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RED STAR MAGAZINE 3-4
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MAY CHRISTIE'S New Novel
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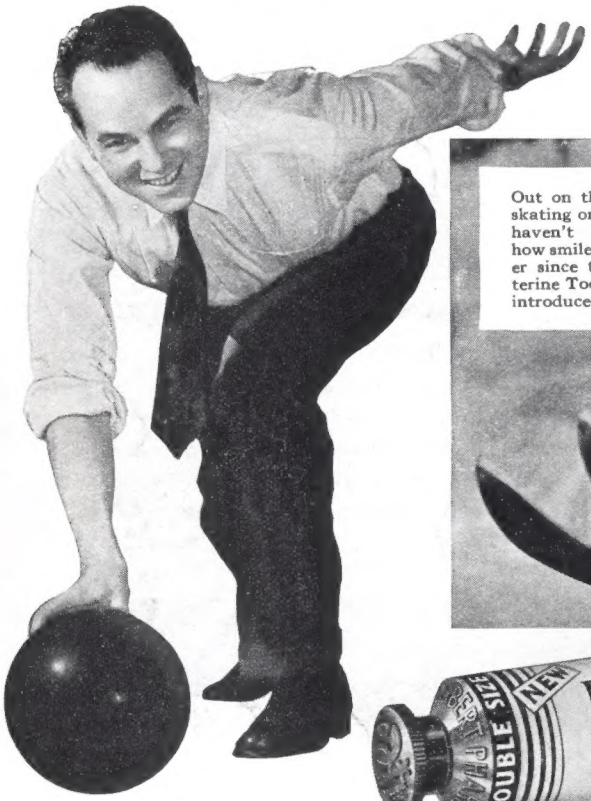

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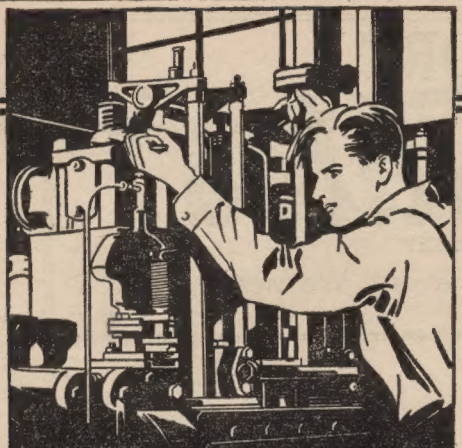

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Volume LXXXII
Number 4

ALL-STORY Love Tales

March 4, 1939

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All Norma asked was one little joy ride

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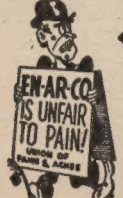

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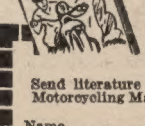

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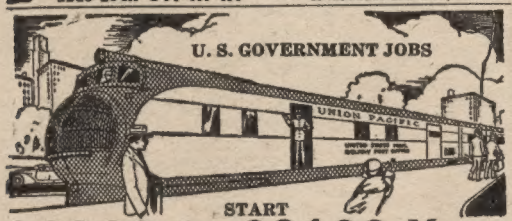

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28x5.25-18	2.90	1.35
29x5.25-19	2.95	1.35
30x5.25-20	3.00	1.35
31x5.25-21	3.25	1.35
5.50-17	3.35	1.40
28x5.50-18	3.35	1.40
29x5.50-19	3.35	1.45
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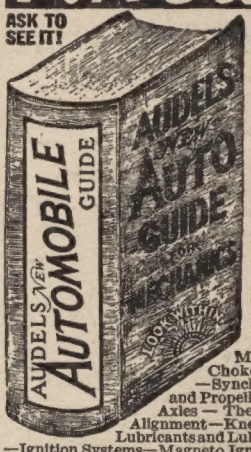

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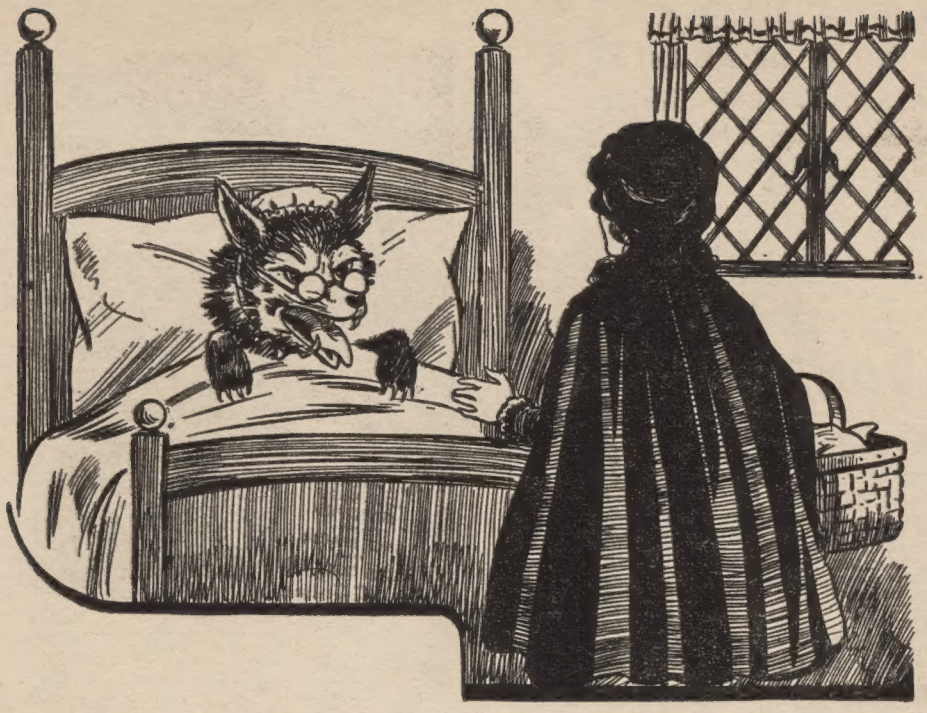


Little Red Riding Hood, on her journey through the forest, met no more dangers than does the Daughter of Today

Which Way to Where?

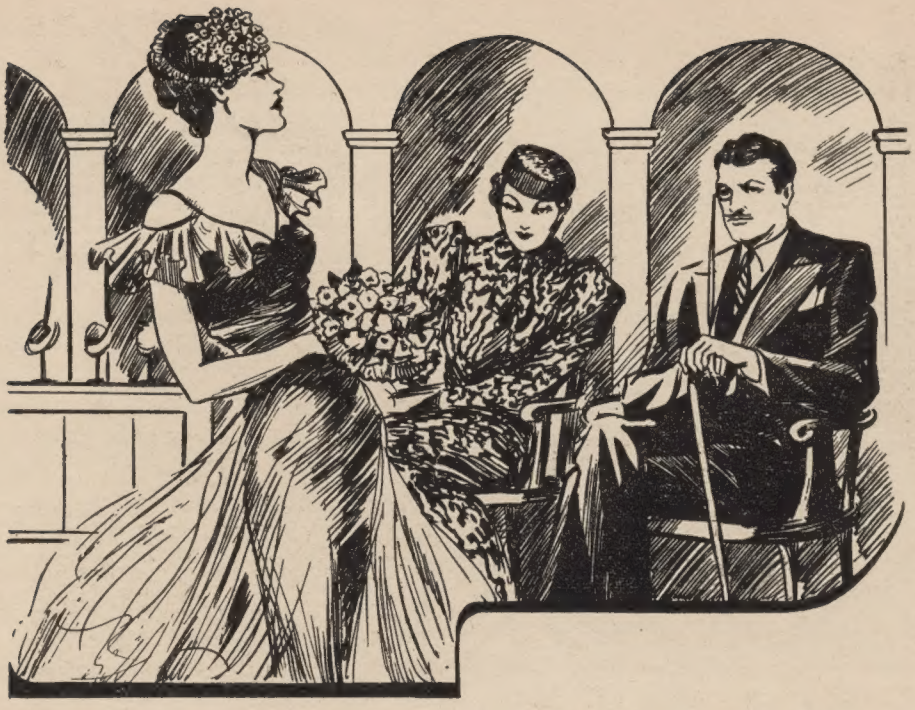
By MAY CHRISTIE

PHIL DEERING floated out on the floor of Hartman and Brook's like a spring breeze. Long-limbed, willowy, she was the firm's best model, and she knew it. But she was sick of it.

Sick of parading and peacocking in ultra dresses. Sick of catering to idle women. And the look in the eyes of Radcliffe Monroe made her sickest of all.

"Like a cat's. No, a leopard's," she thought, as his gaze with a curiously burning quality assessed her. Had the pupils of his eyes really narrowed to vertical slits?

She swayed past him and his com-



Radcliffe lifted his monocle and stuck it in his eye. "The better to see you with, my dear!"

panion quickly, as though a paw might swoop out and grab her. Oh, for a meat-ax!

She heard Madge Albright say to him, in the soft, appealing way that was her racket: "Don't you think a gentler blue would be more becoming to me, Radcliffe? I sort of dread the ordeal of the wedding, being on exhibition, people staring—"

"Don't worry. It's not your show. It's the bride's."

Phil thought: "That'll tie her. Or will it?" The *nouveau-riche* Miss Albright hating people to look at her, indeed.

"Mr. Monroe is signaling you to go back to him," crackled Ben Hartman, her boss.

Phil pirouetted about. The Prussian-command note was not to be ignored. Thinking of little brother Billy whose summer camp would demand the squeezing of every nickel of her thirty-five-a-week, she let her lovely lips slide into the smile of the professional model.

She undulated before the man and the girl.

Lifting his monocle on its watered black ribbon, Radcliffe set it in his right eye. ("The better to see you, my dear! Wolf! Wolf!" Phil thought whimsically.)

Madge Albright cooed to him: "What do you think? You're so marvelous at color and design."

Her pale eyes under the artificial lashes—at three dollars a throw—had the helpless appeal of a child's. But Phil knew she was all of twenty-six, with the nose of a Stock Exchange President for money.

"As a bridesmaid's gown it's ex-

quisite. And perfectly displayed." His gaze seemed to bore like a red-hot gimlet through the frail mousseline-de-soie on its taffeta slip.

"Being the finest painter and illustrator in this town, of course you'd know." Miss Albright let loose a long breath, as though the weight of the world had slipped from her shoulders. "Thanks ever so much, Radcliffe." She took the compliment to herself.

Phil thought of certain adjectives little Billy had picked up in school; words which, she had to caution him, were never, no never, used in polite circles.

The rich Miss Albright rose. Time to go. Her voice had the hint of a rasp in it as she instructed the model to deliver the gowns at an address on Park Avenue.

"That's out of my province. You must talk to Mr. Hartman," was Phil's composed reply.

The customer gave her a furious look and swept over to the boss.

Radcliffe, seizing the chance, said under his breath: "Won't you come to tea at my studio tomorrow? I'd love it if you would."

"Thanks, no," said Phil.

"You have a date?"

"Yes."

"Masculine, presumably?"

She nodded. Little brother Billy, aged eight.

"Can't blame him, you're so lovely. Your hair is honey color. D'you know you're sweet from your honey hair to your toes?"

"Thank you." Best not be disagreeable. But her tone was flat.

"I want to paint you. Ask Mr. Hartman to let you off some afternoon next week."

"Oh, I couldn't do that. My job's important to me. I don't want to lose it."

"I'd give you one any day. Remember that."

He was rich and famous, and this was flattering. But she was uneasy.

"It isn't so bad here, thanks," she said.

"I repeat I want to paint you, Miss Deering. I'll pay you handsomely. Think it over."

A moment later, he was light-footing it out of the salon with Miss Albright.

THE wedding day broke in a downpour of rain. As Phil bent over little brother Billy, still asleep in his cot beside her bed in the modest two-room-and-kitchenette "walk-up," love and anxiety mingled in her dark blue eyes. He had coughed in the night. He mustn't go to school on this wet day. Father and mother to him as she was, no parent could have watched over him more devotedly than his lovely half-sister.

She placed a slim, beautiful hand on his brow, pushing back his curls. Was he feverish? If so, she wouldn't go to work.

Billy opened his eyes. They were of the same deep blue as Phil's own. The resemblance between the pair was noticeable. Children of different fathers, they took after their mother who had died when Billy was barely three.

"Feeling okay, darling?" She took his hand. It was warm, but not hot. She drew a long breath.

"Uh-huh." He smiled sleepily. Little angel he looked. Poignantly dear. She'd work all summer through and forget the heat and the tiresome customers just to get Billy to that camp.

"It's raining. If you'll be a good boy and eat a good breakfast, you won't have to go to school."

He made a little grimace. "Not hungry."

Phil's heart contracted. A child ought to wake up hungry.

As she prepared his orange juice and cereal, she told herself vehemently that a Third Avenue flat in the summer—or any time at all—was no place for a delicate child. The money that floated in and out of Hartman and Brook's hung on female addlepates, could fill every state in the Union with camps for kids.

Coax Billy to eat now.

He repeated his refusal.

"The orange juice, then."

As he sipped it with no enthusiasm, she offered Maggie Dooley with her big, cheery kitchen on the ground floor as an inducement.

Big, buxom Maggie was the caretaker of the building, right out of County Down. When it came to children, she was "crazy about the craythurs." With a fund of inexhaustible stories. And a heart as big as her bosom, which was a featherbed on which Billy often had been cradled when he was smaller. Maggie's kitchen was magic territory to the child, peopled with "quare little spalpeens" and fairies and hobgoblins.

He adored Maggie and swallowed his cereal. He toyed with a small airplane while Phil did her morning exercises in the next room. Usually she enjoyed them. But the main reason, the preservation of her lovely figure for her job, today annoyed her. *Kick!* Higher! Hard! There! That one was right in the seat of Radcliffe Monroe's pants.

One—two—three—up—down. The job was hard on the feet and ankles. They needed daily whittling. Go to it!

The windmill twist now. She had beautifully modeled shoulders and flat back, with a small waist. They must be kept that way.

Now make the giraffe neck. Like the short old girls coming in late to the fashion shows, craning to see everything and get their money's worth.

The inverted bicycle exercise now on the floor. Oh, to be perched on an honest-to-goodness bicycle, careening out of New York forever!

A hasty shower. Orange juice. Dry toast. Coffee minus sugar and cream. What a kick she could get out of waffles and maple syrup and little sausages this beastly morning, but if she meant to stay Size 12 she mustn't think about it.

She picked up Billy and his toys and deposited them with faithful Maggie belowstairs. Fought her way into a bus for the half mile to the shop.

The morning was bedlam. The phone shrieked like a five-alarm fire. There'd been an alteration in the bridesmaids' dresses, due to an inspiration of Miss Albright, who, under her helpless, yielding manner, was as obstinate as a mule. The girls were going frantic over the late delivery of their costumes. At one o'clock Ben Hartman ordered Phil to jump into a taxi with the dresses for the four tall bridesmaids.

As her taxi skidded in a Big Apple on Park Avenue, Phil thought: "I hope she trips and breaks her leg going up the aisle!" To be rebuked by a cardboard box that leaped from its fellows to hit her smartly on her tiptilted nose—just punishment!

Worse bedlam awaited her.

One of the four tall virgins, it seemed, had at this eleventh hour been laid low.

"A sudden attack of appendicitis. The doctor's in with her, applying ice packs. How on earth can we find a substitute this late?" wailed one.

"We four have to be of the exact same height," from another.

"Lilian'll throw fits. She's so superstitious. She didn't want her wedding on a Friday, but her mother insisted, and now it's pouring cats and dogs. And this illness is another bad omen!"

The bride's mother, who had been summoned by phone, marched in.

"Lilian must know nothing of this till the ceremony's over," she rapped out. Her eye lit on Phil. "You modeled the gown, didn't you? What about you as a substitute?" she suggested.

Came a startled *"Oh!"* from behind. Madge Albright's buttonish mouth was puckered in a protest. "Oh, I know lots of girls we could phone to."

"You've held us up enough already with that darned last-minute alteration to our dresses," snapped the daughter of the house, who was plain-spoken.

A maid rapped on the door. "Doctor says to tell you he's phoning for an ambulance."

"That settled it, sorry as we all are," the bride's mother declared. "You, miss, will wear the gown"—to Phil—"and none of you girls"—she turned to the other three—"say a word to anyone about the reason of the substitution. I'm not going to have the happiest day of my darling's life spoiled. She is *so* sensitive."

"A quality," thought Phil, "of which her mother is apparently devoid."

"I'll pay you a fee, naturally," the woman rattled on, "and you will attend the reception with the other bridesmaids. Phone your employer at the shop at once."

ST. THOMAS' on Park Avenue was banked with flowers. Tall candles gleamed as the rain streamed down outside. With a darkly attractive usher beside her, Phil swayed with the grace of the perfect model up the aisle, between festoons of white satin ribbons. The organ boomed forth Lohengrin's Wedding March.

"Tum-tum-tee-*tum. Tum-tum*-tee-*tee."* How lucky she was to get such a good-looking man to walk with. Name of Bradley Connors.

"Tum-tum-tee-*umpty."* Who could he be?

"Ta-*rum-tum*-ta-*ree."* Was Maggie giving little Billy his cod liver oil, as she had told her to?

"Tum-tum-tee-*tum."* No, don't hum it. That was ill-bred. She was in high sassiety now. Or was she? Madge Albright was right behind her, ready to run her through with an icepick.

"Fiddle-diddle-da-dee." The bridegroom was fiddling with his tie as he waited ahead. He looked as though he might throw a fit any minute. He was so red in the face, poor darling!

Ha! There were five customers of Hartman and Brook's twisting round in their pew like cranes, gaping at her. Maybe they'd think now she belonged in the Four Hundred. That would teach them a lesson not to be so rude the next time they came to the shop!

Four tall bridesmaids and four little ones tagging on behind, like a Mutt and Jeff cartoon. What a parade! To the tune of at least ten thousand dollars, including the reception and the champagne.

Radcliffe Monroe had Number One of the little bridesmaids on his arm, the prettiest of the four. Would he ask her up to see his paintings? Was Phil herself a fool not to grab his offer? How much would he pay her for a sitting? "I could," she thought whimsically, "take a few lessons in ju-jitsu first."

Queer to be holding the arm of a man whose voice you hadn't even heard. He had a stunning profile. Aquiline, nice nose. Luminous dark eyes under well-defined brows. A broad

forehead. A strong chin. A firmly modeled mouth.

He looked like Somebody. To the manor born. That sweep of brow to chin, the shape of his fine head, the way he carried his lithe and well-made figure spelled aristocrat.

Well, what of it? Most men were the same in the long run. Leave it at that.

He was probably frightfully conceited, and expected her to fall for him. She wouldn't do it!

The bridesmaids spread out, fanwise, behind the bride. The beautiful wording of the marriage ceremony began. How would *she* feel if she stood before a candlelit, flower-banked altar, promising to "have and to hold—for better or worse—in sickness and in health—till death us do part"?

To her own surprise, Phil Deering felt a tremor pass through her.

It must be wonderful to be in love!

Practical as she was in everyday living, she was an idealist at heart. Love, the kind she'd never met, she set on a

He was a snob; he scorned her since he had found out she was only a model. Well, here was her chance to look down her nose at *him!*

high plane. A number of disillusionments had come to her in her profession, so that she had grown skeptical about the average man. Not one of them, so far, had measured up to her standard.

The other girls in the shop called her "choosey."

Queer how she'd stay home nights, reading and studying.

Odd that she seemed perfectly happy week-ends with little Billy.

Funny that she, a lovely model, preferred old slacks and simple living to the most expensive nightclubs and dazzling gowns.

But she was a good sort. Regular. They all liked her. She was square and honest, and had a swell sense of humor.

THE wedding was over. The knot was tied. They were in an expensive restaurant at the reception. The bride was starting the first dance with her husband. Everyone was hand-clapping.

"May I have the pleasure?" Bradley Connors' voice in Phil's ear. Melodious and quiet.

She moved with him out on the floor. As he slipped an arm about her, she put her left hand on his shoulder. They were off.

"English, aren't you?" she inquired.

"No. From Boston."

"That accounts for it."

"For what?"

"Your English accent."

He smiled. "I've just come back from a trip to England, but I can assure you the accent isn't acquired. I'm from the City of Beans."

She asked: "Did you have a good time abroad?"

"Wonderful."

"The London season," she remarked, "must be a great whirl."

"I saw little or nothing of it. I was moving about in the country."

"Business?"

"Of a kind. A mission, you might say. And enthralling, at that."

He must be in the diplomatic service, she imagined.

He danced easily, effortlessly. She was aware they made a very striking couple and that many eyes were turned toward them from the side lines. Enjoy herself. Why not? The knowledge that the girl whose place she'd taken was now on the mend, that she had a right to meet this man on equal ground and would be paid for it by the hostess, gave her a sense of satisfaction.

They moved in perfect unison.

She looked up at him. Nice olive skin, clear. Unlike some of the other groomsmen, he didn't look as if he'd been out on the tiles, celebrating not wisely but too well at last night's good-by-bachelor bean fest!

Nor did he flirt with her. She was uncertain whether to be pleased or piqued.

The music ended. Hand-clapping. An encore. The high-priced orchestra broke into an Hawaiian melody. As her partner's arm encircled Phil and they slid off to the quivering beauty of the steel guitar, she was aware that something trembled between them. Was it her imagination? Or a magnetism in him and the touch of him that sent the blood humming through her veins?

She willed him to look into her eyes.

For a moment he did so. Dark brown met dark blue. Then coolly, he looked right over her head, and beyond. She thought: "He's arrogant."

"Sweet Leilani, heavenly flower," sang the leader of the orchestra.

Phil breathed: "Isn't it silly?"

That brought the magnetic dark eyes back again.

"What is?"

"The words to that nice tune."

He listened, seriously. "The last time I heard that song, was in the barn of an old English farmhouse—over the wireless. That's what they call the radio, you know."

"Yes, I know. What were you doing in the barn? Milking the cows? Or dallying with the dairymaids?"

He laughed. His laugh was as attractive as everything else about him.

"I was dossing in the hay, and there were neither maids nor animals around."

"Indeed! So they provide radios for tramps in England?"

"And thereby hangs a tale," he said.

The music finished, and they went back to their table. The waiters were pouring champagne.

Presently the bride's health would be drunk. And then the groom's, and what-have-you.

Would this detached groomsman drink to her, his partner at the ceremony? Or would he be thinking of something else, as before?

Radcliffe Monroe was bold, but at least he knew the ropes when it came to entertainment and a dash of flirting. So mused Phil when they had sat five or six minutes without Bradley Connors saying a word.

She was used to the compliments of men. Had told herself that she despised them, and was thoroughly fed up with them.

Then why was she chagrined that this good-looking man from Boston offered none of them?

She flashed an impish look at him, inquired: "Is tea the only drink in Boston? Don't you ever take anything with a little more kick to it?"

"Depends on what you mean by kick. What you like and what I like might be poles apart. I go in for simple living."

She said: "Meaning that *I* wallow in luxury? Aren't you a mind reader!" She felt both amused and annoyed. "Do go on."

"You might be bored."

"No. Talking about oneself is always fascinating."

"So is forgetting oneself. Has that ever struck you?"

"Yes, as a prize crack. Might I ask what I said or did to deserve it?"

He apologized. "You've got me wrong. I was merely figuring that a girl like you, in other surroundings, would have plenty to offer. I mean, the real You would have a chance to appear."

"Indeed! What are you? A psychiatrist? Where would you like to transplant me?"

"To out-of-doors. New scenes."

HE LOOKED round the great room with its lavish appurtenances, its hothouse blooms. Its plethora of expensive food and wine. Long tables loaded with Strasbourg foies gras. Quail in aspic. Baskets of plovers' eggs. Foreign pastries of every sort. Buckets and buckets of champagne.

"Ha! Nature, and a natural life. The fog lifts a little. But why," she demanded, "shouldn't people enjoy themselves?"

"Do they? Isn't it a bit synthetic, at that?" His eyes lit on three of the groomsmen who were rapidly getting plastered—if indeed they had been quite sober since last night's bachelor dinner.

"Well, it's a big occasion, isn't it?" she defended.

"And there'll be another occasion tomorrow, and tomorrow, and tomor-

row. Oh, I'm not blaming them. City life today is paced too fast. The pressure's hard."

"From the office to the cocktail bar. That doesn't meet with your approval?" she challenged.

"If it stopped there. But you know how it goes. From there to a fuddled dinner, and so on to the nightclubs. Evening after evening, is that wise?"

"They seem to enjoy it or they wouldn't do it."

"It isn't happiness. It's counterfeit. Fake."

She knew he was right, and had an impulse to say: "I'm with you there." But she was in no mood to be nice to him. Who was he to classify her with the café set, the frivolers, when she was hard-working and home-loving?

She snapped: "So you don't approve of our sophisticated indoor amusements? Aren't you a bit self-righteous?"

"No. Only experienced." He gave her a long look with his handsome dark eyes. "I've chased pleasure in the bars myself, and all I ever got out of it was a headache."

"No friends?" There must be lots of women in his life, she thought.

"Acquaintances. It's getting down to the realities of living that makes friends. Training oneself to self-discipline. I grant you friendship is the most crying need in the world today. But you don't find it in bars or nightclubs."

The best man rose to propose a toast to the bride. Phil's glass was filled by a waiter. The assembly rose. There were cheers. Her partner drank the toast, and several others followed.

When they were reseated, she whispered provocatively: "I'm amazed!"

"Why?"

"That you nip with the best! From one so noble, it's surprising."

He laughed outright. But his dark eyes challenged her. "I assure you, I have a very human streak."

"Showing's believing."

"You're a very pretty girl, probably thoroughly spoiled. You're well aware of the prettiness, and want me to comment on it."

"I do not. That's an old song. Can't you think up something new?"

"Just as I said—spoiled. D'you know that dress you're wearing could provide pleasure for a number of young folks?"

"Isn't it doing that now? What's wrong with it?"

"Nothing but its cost."

"Ha! Should I go nudist, give it to charity, and find my own soul? Mr. Bradley Connors," she said firmly, "you're really a very strange person."

"I've never been saner, though, as I said before, I was mad for a time."

She quoted the scriptures, pertly: " 'Whereas I was blind, now I see.' "

"Exactly. And glad of it," he retorted.

"Even at a wedding, one doesn't want too much sermon," she flung back.

He said: "Let's stop razzing. I want to tell you of my experiences abroad."

"At the beginning you sounded as though you'd hoboed it through England, what with the barn and all."

"I did, in a sense. That's what I want to interest you in. Traveling under one's own steam."

She thought: "I'll have nothing left to travel with after I get Billy into that camp. And this man thinks I've got money."

Aloud she said lightly: "Traveling's a great educator."

"The best in the world. And it's

education the world needs today—a better understanding of each other and the land, developed on an international basis. That's what took me to Europe."

"What are you? A Socialist? A Red?"

"Just a plain citizen, but a better one for this scheme that's come into my life in a war-torn world. Miss Deering, d'you realize there wouldn't be any more wars if the youth of the world could get properly acquainted?"

"But how," asked Phil, "do you plan to bring about that? Travel's expensive. What are the boys and girls going to use for money?"

"We're establishing dollar-a-day trips, including bed and meals, all over this land and abroad. A mighty series of chains. We're renting or buying farmhouses, barns, old buildings; fixing them up for the boys and girls on the road to sleep in comfortably at no more than twenty-five cents a night, with kitchens to do their own cooking."

"Barns? That's why you dossed in the hay in England?" Phil's eyes widened.

"Yes. And for twenty-five cents, in old castles as well. Food is figured out at no more than fifty cents a day, both here and in Europe, leaving twenty-five for amusements."

"But train fare—or gas and oil for the cars? They can't possibly get around."

"They do. In the best way possible. Under their own steam. On foot, on bicycle, by canoe, or what they call flatboats. That's still a new sport for people in America."

"You mean, parties of young people join up together for their vacations? No chaperons?" she asked.

"When they join our association, they're put on their honor on the road. And at our overnight hotels there are 'house parents' to look after them. The girls have their own bunkroom, the boys ditto, always comfortable, though it may be a chicken house or a barn. All they need to carry is a sleeping bag. Mattresses and pillows and blankets are provided. I've never heard of any trouble."

Phil drew a long breath. Seeing America at $1-a-day, and maybe a dash of romance on the road! Education and recreation blended!

"It sounds too marvelous to be true."

"I was hoping you might help. Funds are needed."

Before she could check it, Phil gave a grim laugh. Money? So he thought she had money, when it was one of the problems of her life how to make ends meet.

He gave her an inscrutable glance. She was aware that she had fallen in his estimation, and when Radcliffe Monroe came over to ask her for a dance, she got up quickly.

BRADLEY CONNORS was an enigma. She was annoyed that he attracted her. Annoyed that he seemed to judge her before knowing her, sizing up her beauty, this background, these clothes.

When Radcliffe said: "I've been waiting for this moment to have a dance with you, Miss Deering," she felt soothed somehow, and kindlier toward him.

"I meant what I said about painting you." He named a handsome price by the hour. "Could you come to the studio tomorrow about three?"

The money was tempting. She needed it for Billy. She agreed.

"I noticed you know Mr. Connors. Who is he?" she asked, trying to sound casual.

"Connors? Yes. He's a nice chap. Got plenty of dough, and needn't do a day's work in his life, but he works hard. He owns an advertising agency in Boston, but he's been abroad for the past year, on some scheme for bringing about world peace through getting the youth of America back to Nature. As though," added Radcliffe after a pause, and with a wink, "the kids need any teaching beyond what instinct and opportunity gives them. This way, they'll get plenty."

She ignored that. "Is Mr. Connors married?" she asked.

"No. I'd say he's much more of a man's man than a woman's. A bit of an idealist, but no sap. His father was killed in the World War when he was a kid of eight. He was devoted to his mother, so he'll probably make a swell husband, as the saying goes. Are you going to set your cap for him? I warn you there'll be plenty of competition."

"I'm not interested in marriage." She tilted her chin.

"Wise girl! There's lots of fun on the outside, and plenty of good pickings."

She thought disgustedly: "He means

"Chin a little higher, Miss Deering. Robe a little lower. You mustn't hide those exquisite lines," he told her smoothly

himself." She wanted to tell him she'd changed her mind about sitting to him, but remembered the much-needed cash. She felt glad when the dance ended, and she was claimed by other partners.

Presently she was with Bradley Connors again. They danced several times. Back to their table. The clock pointed to six. She remembered Billy. She must phone Maggie Dooley that she'd be a little late. She was about to rise when she saw the bride's mother coming directly toward her.

Bradley Connors rose, offering her a chair.

"No, thank you." The woman turned to Phil, opening her bag, producing an envelope which she handed over, telling her it was her fee for the afternoon, and thanking her stiffly for taking the sick bridesmaid's place.

Color flared in Phil's face. How dared this woman humiliate her in front of Bradley Connors? "I don't wish to accept a fee," she said in a low tone.

"But I insist." Haughty brows raised, "It was purely a business arrangement that you come here, and of course you must be paid."

Billy! Remember tiny Billy and that cough of his!

Phil took the envelope.

She would phone Maggie that she'd be right home. She wouldn't need a second hint.

A waiter told her: "There's a telephone behind your table, madam."

Once back of the screen, cheeks still burning, she opened the envelope. Twenty-five dollars!

"That you, Billy?" His piping voice over the wire. "How's my little darling? Has he been a good boy today?"

Not only Bradley Connors, but Madge Albright, who had seized this opportunity to join him, heard those questions through the thin screen.

He looked amazed.

"Is Miss Deering married?" he asked.

"No. But she adores her little boy," Madge said deliberately, in a low voice and with a look full of meaning.

SATURDAY. The downpour still on. Phil heard the rain on the windows at five in the morning when she wakened from a dream of Bradley Connors.

"Why did I ever come here?" Phil thought desperately. "Before I risk it again I'll take a course in ju-jitsu!"

The setting was a barn dance. The two of them were sitting out a dance in the hay. Bradley had put his arm about her and kissed her, and she'd been in the seventh heaven of happiness, till Radcliffe Monroe came up and

said: "Congratulations! Didn't I tell you he was a catch?"

"But she isn't the girl for me!" Bradley had said, and pushed her away.

It was then that she wakened and remembered yesterday. The wedding party. The snub about the fee. Bradley and she had got along beautifully till Madge Albright's jealousy had been aroused. She had seen Madge speaking to the hostess, staring over at her and Bradley.

It all fitted. Madge had hinted to the bride's mother that Phil was overstepping her position, and had engineered the humiliation.

And he'd been snob enough to change immediately.

She hated him for it. Hated him for the stiff bow with which he had bidden her goodby. Madge Albright was beside him. When she condescended to say, "You did beautifully, Miss Deering," Phil could have slapped her. Birds of a feather, she and Bradley. She hated them equally.

Wet scramble to the store. Business poor. A disgruntled boss. Prickly as a hedgehog. Keep her temper. Can the snappy come-back.

Should she call off the date with Radcliffe Monroe, or should she go?

She needed the money badly, but, over and above that, she knew there was another reason. Oh, she was a weak idiot to want to hear more about Bradley Connors after he had high-hatted her, but she'd get even with him for it!

Meantime, she'd pump Radcliffe.

She reached the studio at three. He opened the door. He wore a green linen smock that made his eyes seem more catlike than ever. And he had honey on his tongue. She must be careful.

"My dear child, so good of you to come. I'd have sent my chauffeur for you, but I didn't know your home address."

He took her umbrella. She slid out of her raincoat and walked into the studio. A small gallery ran round three sides. Lovely tapestries and rugs that glimmered in mosaic blending hung from the railing. These, with the paintings, formed a riot of passionate color that was breath-taking.

There were flowers everywhere. American Beauties on the grand piano sprawled with a gorgeous Spanish shawl. American Beauties soaring from a Chinese vase that was four feet high itself. On his desk of carved ebony, in a magnificent jade bowl, roses so darkly red that they looked as if fashioned of black velvet.

An incredibly lovely scent lingered on the air. Under foot, a rug so thick that one's feet sank into it.

The light through the great window a soft blue, because of the clouds and the rain. Over the immense stone mantelpiece that was six feet from the floor, the slim and exquisite painting of a nude girl.

Phil drew a long breath. She thought: "The man's an artist."

Keenly he watched the effect of his studio on her.

He had watched it on many a girl before. He was a hunter of beauty, though he described himself as a worshiper.

"You like my little workshop?" His voice, thought Phil, would woo a bird from the bough.

Only she was no bird, but a hard-boiled model who knew her way about. Or so she fancied. Nobody's fool.

She'd cope with him.

"Let's get to work, shall we? Remember, I come high."

"Desirable things always do, Miss

Deering." He smiled. Lusciously.

"What do you want to paint me in?" She purposely made her voice flat.

"I had thought of a blue robe, the color of your eyes. D'you know, you look Russian?"

"No?"

"But yes." He came nearer, looking her over. "Definitely." His short, strong fingers with the spatulate tips, touched her cheekbones. "See! Pitched high."

She drew back.

"Don't be afraid. A beautiful woman, a beautiful sunset." He shrugged. "It's all the same to an artist."

She doubted that, in connection with him. But hope for the best.

"All right. The blue robe. Where is it?"

"Behind the screen, over there. Naturally, with your superb figure you wear nothing under it." His eyes ran over the lovely lines of her body.

Discreetly hidden, Phil slid out of her clothes and into the robe. She was no sooner into it than he came round the screen with his catlike movement.

"Pardon me." He opened a door in a small sideboard, drawing out a bottle and two small glasses. "Vodka."

She thought grimly: "To get into the Russian spirit. He would!"

She said: "Not for me, thanks. No, I'm not a bit chilly." She went out to the studio and got up on the model's stand. There was a small settee and she sat down on it and waited, knowing perfectly that Radcliffe was annoyed with her for refusing the drink.

He set up easel and canvas. Arranged her pose. Started work.

The doorbell rang. Once. Twice. Three times. He did not move. Where were the servants?

He said, reading her thoughts: "They're out. At a Japanese festival."

"Hadn't you better go to the door?"

"Not when I'm working."

A few minutes later, the phone rang shrilly. He went to it.

"Yes, this is Monroe. Busy . . . very busy . . ." Phil noted the curious expression on his face. He was smiling, with narrowed eyes. "Yes, yes . . . Beautiful . . . Oh, definitely . . ." The smile widened. It looked cruel. "I wouldn't do that if I were you. Not that I've any right to advise you."

He hung up. The phone rang a second time, immediately. He shrugged as he picked up the receiver. Now his face was a mask. His voice that had sounded amused before, cold.

"All right, do as you please," he said. "No one's stopping you." He came back to his canvas.

"Chin a little higher, Miss Deering. You've got an exquisite line from throat to bosom. Robe a little lower, please."

She let it slide down over the left shoulder. "And wonderful flesh tints," he added softly.

She said nothing to that. He worked for a few more minutes.

"I'm not satisfied with this." He came up to the stand and arranged a new pose. Figure reclining on the left side. Same position as the great canvas over the mantelpiece. His hands lingered on the frail stuff that covered her.

"Why this at all? I'll paint you as God made you." He made to pull off the robe, but she clutched it about her and jumped up from the couch.

"If you think I'm going to pose for you in the nude you've got another guess coming! Get that straight!" She was so beautiful in her anger and outraged dignity that her lure for this

man was doubled. He grabbed her in his arms.

"Little spitfire! I'll pay you. I promised."

"I don't want your dirty money!" she cried, struggling.

"You know you like me."

"Yes. Like this!" And she gave him a ringing box on his ear.

SHE left raincoat and umbrella behind her in her rage. Out on the street, with the rain pouring on her one good suit and hat, she realized that. Darn it, she'd have to get a taxi. Meantime, she sheltered in a doorway on the East River.

Swell weather to cool off in!

In the torrent, no one was about. But stay! across the street, what was that? What was the soaked little figure doing at the top of those steps leading to the river?

Something impelled Phil to shout from her doorway: "Hey, kid, don't you know enough to come in out of the rain?"

The small creature turned and looked in the direction of the voice, with dazed eyes.

"Come on over or you'll get pneumonia," Phil called.

Child or woman, as though forced by something stronger than itself, the figure finally shuffled over.

"For the love of Pete, what were you doing out there? Fishing?" A pathetic, shivering spectacle—a young girl with a pixy-like face distorted as if in pain. Great eyes under winged brows and a soaked shoulder-length bob. "What were you doing? Going swimming?" asked Phil.

"I was going to finish it all," the girl said in a husky voice.

She still acted as though in a dream. She turned to go back to the water, but Phil grabbed her by her dripping shoulder.

"Don't you know they arrest people for that? You stay right here. What's the trouble?"

"Nothing you could cure."

"If it's a man, kid, take it from me there's none of them worth worrying over." And Phil meant it.

The girl nodded. "Sure. But just the same, I don't want to go on. I'm done."

"Not on your sweet life! What are you talking about? Why, you aren't a day over eighteen! Hi! taxi—*taxi!*" waving frantically, fairly pushing the unknown into a taxi that had just deposited somebody in the building next door. "Where d'you live, child? What's your address?"

"Nowhere," sullenly.

"Okay." Phil gave her own street and number to the man. They shot off in the rain. The girl stared straight ahead of her, unseeingly. She seemed in a trance. "Poor little tike!" thought Phil. She reminded her, poignantly, of the small frail Billy.

Maggie Dooley was in with Billy upstairs.

"Got a drop of whisky downstairs? Go get it, Maggie—and take Billy with you," Phil added meaningly. She turned to the bedraggled girl. "It's you for a hot bath, young lady, and I'm going to make you a nice hot toddy, and then"—as the door closed behind the astounded Maggie—"I bet you'll feel quite different."

"Let me alone. I won't stay here." The girl made for the door.

But in two strides the long-limbed Phil barred the exit. "Listen. You'll do as I say, or I'll call the police. You don't want to be turned in, do you?"

The prettily rounded, weak chin quivered.

"Come on. Brace up. Into the bathroom you go and out of these clothes."

Phil fairly pushed her into the bathroom, with one hand turning on the hot water, with the other slipping the key from the inside of the door. She was taking no chances. She knew despair when she saw it, and there was no knowing what the distraught girl would do.

"Look, there's a clean robe on that peg—bath slippers down there. The window's shut. You'd better leave the door open."

Maggie returned with a pint bottle of rye. With a wink Phil said: "Billy can have supper with you downstairs." Keeping one eye on the bathroom—the tiny kitchen was a hand-reach from it—she started squeezing lemons for the toddy.

"Say, nothing like a good hot drink to ward off a chill. And I'm going to give you a couple of aspirins first," she sang out cheerily.

No answer. She heard the girl get out of the tub.

" 'Bout ready?"

"Uh-huh." The thin little figure looked grotesquely small in Phil's terry robe and slippers.

"C'mon. Hop into my bed." Phil tucked her in, propping her up with pillows. "The aspirins first. Here's the water. Now the toddy. You'll be a new woman, I wager, when you get to the bottom of that glass."

She stood over her, insisting. She wouldn't let her talk till she'd got the last drop down.

"What's your name, and why were you making such a darn fool of yourself when I met you?" she demanded.

"My name's Judy Pryde. You were right," huskily, "about its being a man. I was nuts about a man, and he gave me a raw deal."

"And is there anything new in that? Don't we all get 'em? If all the women in the world that got raw deals jumped into rivers, there'd be no room for boat traffic. When life kicks you, you've got to *kick back!* I'm ashamed of you, Judy Pryde. You don't live up to your name."

Color stole into the thin little face.

"You don't understand. I loved him better than life itself."

"Bunk!" said Phil cheerfully. "You've the whole of your life ahead of you, and it can be mighty sweet at that. Darned if I'd ever let a man get me down."

"You're like an angel—" Suddenly the husky voice broke, and tears poured down the thin cheeks.

"Here. Take a hanky. I got a nice big one ready for you. I scented it with a swell French perfume. It's named just right! 'Here's to the Next Man.' "

"Oh, I'm a fool," sobbed the girl.

"You said it, Judy. But you can snap out of it. Girls today have got to be independent. Listen, have you any folks?"

"No. No one. Just *him*—and—and now—" More sobbing.

"Cry all you want to. It'll get it out of your system—*him* too, for your own sake."

"He was so wonderful."

"He always is, until the pay-off," Phil commented gruffly, for she was deeply touched and didn't want to show it or she'd be turning the tears on, herself. "He was stuck on you, and then he ditched you. S'pose you'd just had your show-down when I stopped you doing a swan dive?"

"Uh-huh. He was with another woman. He—he wouldn't even see me. I told him I'd jump in the river, and —and he told me: 'No one's stopping you.' "

"But *I* did, so that made your boy-friend a liar. He sounds like bad news, to me."

A pause.

"What do you do for a living, Judy? Apart from this swell egg you're darn silly to shed a tear over?"

"I trained as a dancer. I'm from Minnesota, see? When my folks died, I came to New York, but all I could land—till I met *him*—was a job as a taxi-dancer. It's tough. You know, only a few cents an hour."

Phil thought of the handsome by-the-hour fee she had, this afternoon, forever forfeited. But the box on that ear was worth it!

"Have you any money, Judy?"

"N-not a dime. I wouldn't take it, not unless we made up. I do have some pride left."

"And you've no friends? No relatives to go to? No home?"

The girl shook her small head.

Phil thought: "This would have to happen to me when money is my problem, darn it."

Maggie Dooley's key in the front door. Billy danced in. Seeing the strange small person in the bed beside his own, he said: "Are you sick? Wha's the matter?"

"No, Billy," Phil told him, "but I afraid she was catching a cold."

"So you put her in bed. And she isn't sick at all. Can she stay and play with me? This little girl can stay here and play games with me!" he beamed. It was evident, so small and young she looked in the big bed, that he mistook her for a child of his own age.

"Oh, he's lovely. Why, he takes me for a kid!" Judy breathed. A smile slid over her small face. Suddenly she laughed outright.

A laugh as young and bubbling as Billy's.

"YOU will go down to Easthampton on Saturday for our display at the Village Green Fair. The Fair is one of the highlights of the fashionable summer season on Long Island," said Ben Hartman to his prettiest model, "and you will attend the dance in the evening at the Maidstone Club, wearing the Dúchess of Windsor gown. I have arranged for your admission to the dance. I have also booked a room for you at the Maidstone Inn, overnight. It's too far to get back."

"Yes, Mr. Hartman," Phil answered dutifully. Inwardly she was thinking. "Another trip into Snobdom! It *would* have to happen to *me!*"

What would this Saturday hold for her?

She was soon to get a cue. Not that Ben Hartman had anything to do with the notice in the social columns of her evening paper, stating that Miss Madge Albright would entertain a large party at the dance following the Fair on the Green, at which she would have a Stall.

Nor did it surprise Phil that Mr. Bradley Connors would be in Miss Albright's party at fashionable Easthampton. Pose as he might as a philanthropist, they were nothing but a flock of silly sheep following each other.

She hoped they wouldn't put up at the Inn. But they probably would. She thought: "Not much of the twenty-five-cents-a-night touch about *that*. Not by a long shot!"

Well, he wouldn't get a second chance to bluff her about his nobility, or snub her a second time. If there was any snubbing, she'd get the good work in first!

Maggie Dooley being off to the bedside of a sick relative, it was lucky that she had Judy Pryde. Billy had hailed her as a playmate. So Phil en-

gaged Judy to take care of Billy between the closing of his school and the opening of the summer camp. It fitted perfectly.

It solved the problem of Judy Pryde, temporarily. This dying of a broken heart was the bunk. But the girl seemed to have little stamina. Phil was twenty-three. Judy nineteen. At nineteen, a girl should be as strong as all-get-out.

"She needs country air, too, darn it," thought Phil, who by now felt almost as maternal toward her protégée as she did toward Billy.

She remembered a proverb of her Scotch grandmother's: "The willing horse aye gets the load."

The weather was lovely on Saturday morning as Phil boarded the special for Easthampton, complete with the dresses she would model at the Fair, not forgetting the Duchess of Windsor model for the evening at the grand wind-up at the Maidstone Club.

Would he ask her to dance?

What a fool she was to have fallen for those handsome dark eyes. She was as bad as poor Judy. He was a rich idler, and he had dropped her like a hot potato when the bride's mother treated her like the hired help.

Lovely, centuries-old trees—were they elms?—round the Village Green. Right among them nestled the house that was the inspiration of the song: "Home Sweet Home."

In 1938, with the world topsy-turvy, and everyone losing their homes, or hating them, wasn't that a laugh?

By three in the afternoon she was on the specially built runway. Well, if he hadn't believed she was a model, now he'd know it. She had only to look down her nose to see him sitting among the other snobs.

He was there. In a white linen suit, with a dark red polka-dot tie from Sulka's, his panama hat on his knees.

Phil turned on the end of the runway, right above Bradley Connors, her gown of orchid muslin that was priced $300 breezing about her. On her golden head one of the new doll hats. The darn thing obscured her right eye, but she could see him through the left one. Handsome brute! Wouldn't it be swell to lead him a merry chase?

Now into Chanel's velvet evening gown of the 1900 era, with its slim hipline and bell-shaped skirt bordered with wide bands of fur.

Then the Vionnet princess costume, with the Florentine bolero worked in purple, amethyst and rose.

Next, the new Schiaparelli stunt. Leave it to Schiaparelli to pick the prize scream out of the bag. If Phil hadn't known what she looked like in those high kid buttoned boots in green, worn with a mauve dinner gown, the audience quickly let her know. They fairly shrieked.

All in the sweet cause of Charity, thought Phil, and what crimes are committed in thy name!

Meantime, though she didn't see him, Radcliffe Monroe the artist had arrived and was chatting with one of the models in the dressing tent.

Radcliffe had a scheme up his sleeve. It would convey to the elusive Phil that he could be both generous and forgiving for that box on the ear she'd given him; that he wasn't such a rotter, after all. Also that if she had a change of heart, he was still willing to have future dealings with her.

To get a check for one hundred dollars conveyed to her, with no tags to it, would look like heaping coals of fire on her proud head. Paying her for sittings she'd denied him! She seemed honest. Once the check was in her

hands, she'd be tempted to keep it, but her honesty would compel her to work for it.

There, on a hanger, he saw the identical blue suit she'd worn to his studio that fateful afternoon. Just to be prepared, he'd already written out the check. Now, the right moment was drawing very near.

As the model he was talking to was summoned to the back of the tent by another model, it was the work of a second to slip the check, made out to Phil and signed by him for one hundred dollars, into the side pocket of the short smart jacket. It was so striking in color and design that there could be no mistaking it was hers.

The dress parade came to its close. Phil stepped from the runway, and as she did so, she encountered Madge Albright. They were alone at the moment, so Madge could afford to be generous. With false sweetness she remarked: "You looked lovely in the sunlight, Miss Deering. You haven't a wrinkle or a line."

The Fair was going strong. The merry-go-rounds brayed. Phil went back into the dressing tent and changed into her suit. She'd escape for a while. Leave the Green to have a sweetening look at "Home Sweet Home" across the road.

A quaint old house set in a little green world. Happy children must have sliddered down that sloping roof under the spreading trees, shouted to each other from those darling little windows under the eaves. She thought of Billy. Oh, for a home like that for him! "Be it ever so humble—" Tears sprang to her eyes.

A voice suddenly behind her. A masculine voice, saying quizzically: "Somehow I didn't think *this* would attract you, Miss Deering!"

She wheeled around. It was Bradley Connors, a faint smile on his brown face.

She wanted to shout at him: "Am I so queer? Don't you realize that the whole world has been singing of this home and what it stands for? Why should *I* be different from other human beings?"

But pride stopped her, and anger at his injustice. Why should she have to defend herself to this man?

"It's a funny little dump, isn't it? Now that I've taken a good look at it, strikes me it's nothing to make a song about," she forced herself to answer.

His lips quirked again in that odd smile. "You mean you prefer the night-clubs?"

"Certainly! And pleasures and palaces, as well!" she fairly snapped back. "You've got all the opportunity to do as you darn please in a man's world, Mr. Connors, and in spite of your noble airs you amuse yourself."

"I said our ideas of amusement are quite different," he reminded her.

"You know nothing whatever about me!" Her eyes were blue flames.

"Would you be surprised if I told you that I'd like to know more?"

With a hand thrust into either pocket of her jacket, head flung up angrily, she retorted: "Why should I be surprised? You men are all alike."

He bowed ironically, his fine brows raised.

"They say we are what you women make us," he replied.

"As Adam said to Eve in another Garden. Or was it to the serpent?" She laughed. "There's nothing new in men blaming their weaknesses on women, but I'm surprised at a man of the world like you, Mr. Connors, dragging in that old gag."

"If it's true, why shouldn't I?"

She said hotly, "It's usually the other way around!"

"You mean that women are what men make them?" he asked quietly, his dark eyes searching her face.

"Oh, we're all saps at times. But once bitten, twice shy. We get wise," she answered in a hard voice.

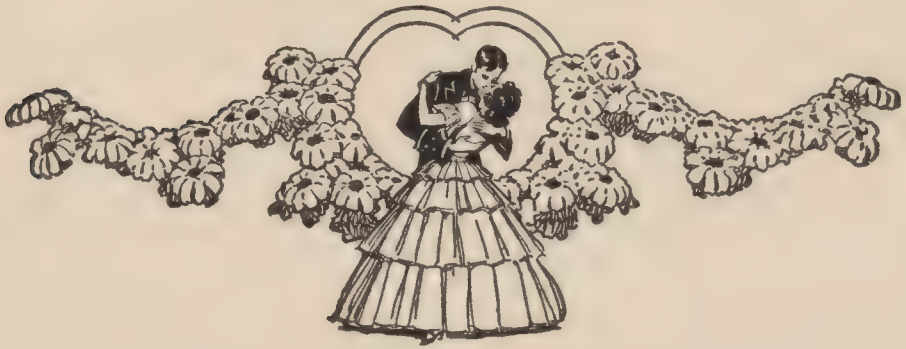
A breeze blew across the Green, almost lifting her hat from her head, so that she took her two hands out of her jacket pockets to set it on firmly. She swung on her heel with a brusk, "Goodby, Mr. Connors," and was off like an outraged Diana.

Something had blown out of her pocket. He called to her, but she would not turn about. She hurried on.

He stooped and retrieved the something. It was a piece of paper, and the words on it stood out bold and clear:

Pay to the order of
Miss Phil Deering . . . $100
One Hundred Dollars
Then the signature:
Radcliffe Monroe.

To Be Continued



Help 15 Miles Of Kidney Tubes

To Flush out Acids and Other Poisonous Waste

Doctors say your kidneys contain 15 Miles of tiny tubes or filters which help to purify the blood and keep you healthy. Most people pass about 3 pints a day or about 3 pounds of waste.

Frequent or scanty passages with smarting and burning shows there may be something wrong with your kidneys or bladder.

An excess of acids or poisons in your blood, when due to functional kidney disorders, may be the beginning of nagging backache, rheumatic pains, leg pains, loss of pep and energy, getting up nights, swelling, puffiness under the eyes, headaches and dizziness.

Don't wait! Ask your druggist for Doan's Pills, used successfully by millions for over 40 years. They give happy relief and will help the 15 Miles of kidney tubes flush out poisonous waste from your blood. Get Doan's Pills. (ADV.)

LET'S TALK ABOUT IT

DEAR EDITOR:

I have meant for a long time to write and tell you how much I enjoy ALL STORY-LOVE TALES. I particularly liked "Postpone the Wedding," by June Elder. I was disappointed not to find any story by her in the last number. Can't you persuade her to write more often?

I like stories by Beulah Poynter and Dorothy Dow, too, but I believe June Elder is my favorite. Her characters always seem so real, I just hate to finish a story and lose sight of them.

You have a lot of grand writers,

ROSE of Colorado Springs.

We do buy from June whenever we get a chance, and you will find many more of her stories in the spring and early summer. But no writer on earth could do one every week and keep them up to standard.

DEAR MISS EDITOR:

I have read your magazine for the past three years and wouldn't miss a copy. The stories get better all the time. This week's issue is one of the BEST EVER. I think "He Married No Angel" is adorable, but then I always like June Elder's stories. She and Helen Burns and Ellen Farley are my special pets.

I like to read about foreign countries because I always hope to go some day. I don't like the long serials so much but I enjoy every page of your magazine.

JULIA of Cleveland.

This seems to be the week for the June Elder Boosters' Club.

DEAR MISS EDITOR:

Congratulations on the Dec. 17th LOVE TALES. The whole magazine is good, but two stories especially stand out. "Dr. Jerry" is very different and sweet, and leaves a good taste in the mouth. "No Other Man," by Elsa Nichols, is very true to life. I have known many men like that, selfish, *ego-ish*, weak. Of course Mrs. Harry Pugh Smith is as always exciting and peppy, and the other stories are good.

Gratefully yours for the enjoyment you are giving your readers everywhere,

MARY of Vermont.

Elsa Nichols will be with us again as soon as the current serial is finished. meanwhile, let her speak for herself:

I've been having Fun in the Kitchen again. It was my turn to have the two families (God bless 'em) to dinner for New Year's. We have no dining room and the oven is the size of a matchbox. Last year the butcher sent me an ostrich, and it took the combined efforts of the whole Sixth Floor to get me a tin big enough to cook the creature in. This year I managed better. I took my own roasting tin to the butcher's and had the bird fitted to it. I pass this idea on free to all who would care to use it. It's a very valuable cooking hint.

True, it caused a slight commotion in the store, and quite a crowd gathered to watch the fitting. Their comments were not altogether serious . . . Enough!

ELSA.

Here I am again with five more coupons. I would like a picture by X. W., who drew the pictures for Maysie Greig's nice "Girl on His Hands." I have several by Dorothy Flack and three by the man who does not sign his name. So I want some by X. W. I am going to hang one by each artist in my boudoir (bedroom to you).

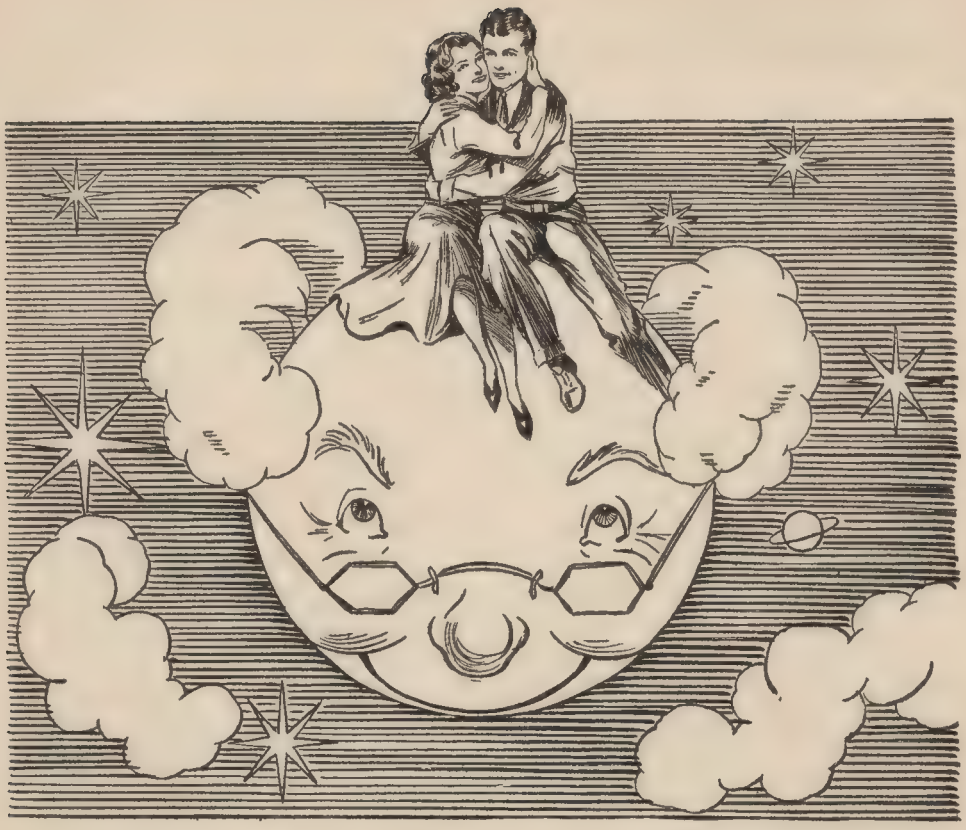
Well, thanks for listening in. Your pictures really are beautiful. The stories are swell, too.

ROSALIE DEL F., New York.

Why do you have such lousy pictures to go along with your grand stories? They spoil everything. You like to picture the hero and heroine to yourself, the way the author describes them, and then you look at what the artist drew and it's just Too Bad!

V. WILLIAMS, Georgia.

You see, it's all in the eye of the beholder!



Two Seats ON THE *Moon*

By EDITH GREGWARE

It was a beautiful dream, but he'd reserved the seats for another girl

NORMA gathered tiny folds of shimmering satin and tipped her head to admire the high lights and rich depths without losing a single motion of her hands.

"Just the right color. Just my color," she breathed ecstatically.

She longed to hold great lengths of it against her, to lay folds of it against the whiteness of her throat. She wanted

to drape it into a shining gown and dance—dance with Lon. She wanted to have him know she could dance, know she was beautiful. And she would be beautiful. She would have to be beautiful if she wore things like that; color that would reflect the shades of her copper gold hair-shine, that would mirror her gaiety; luster that would match her happiness.

For just an instant Norma raised her eyes from her work and let them rest on Lon Dodson, who was bent over his desk, making designs for perfume boxes like the one she was lining.

All she could see was a pair of wide-shirt-sleeved shoulders and a smooth, shining dark disk that was the top of his head. But there was always the chance that he might look up, might even smile at her.

Quickly conscious of her surroundings and of the other girls at the bench, she slipped the satin lining into the perfume box and anchored it with trained fingers. The next box was at her hand, waiting, and the next and the next. Thousands of them, and thousands of those little oblongs of beautiful coppery satin to fold and admire.

"What're you dreaming about this time? Think you're sitting on the moon with Lon?" Marge leaned across the two girls who separated them.

Norma flushed. Would she never learn to keep the dreams out of her eyes?

A girl named Laura laughed gleefully. "I know. She's thinking about the swell time she had with Lon last night. Why don't you tell us about it? We always tell you what we do."

A titter ran down the ranks of girls, making the flush deepen on Norma's cheeks and neck but she kept her lips tightly closed and her eyes on her work.

If only she could lash back at them. If she only could tell them just once of good times, boast of boy friends. But they all knew, to use their own expression, that she was goofy about Lon. And they knew he never looked at any girl in the plant.

"Well, if you must know," she flashed, "Lon and I drove out West Boulevard all the way to Heartland, to dance. We were breaking in his new car. Have you seen it yet?" She was aghast at her own words. Why had she said all that? Why had she dared to lie? Lon had a new car to be sure, but she'd be the last one to ride in it.

The titters changed to hoots. Helen spoke for the girls. "Is that so? Funny no one ever sees him making eyes at you around here, then."

Norma plunged deeper. "He feels that our friendship is sacred. He doesn't feel that everyone around here has to know what we do on our own time. And neither do I. That's why I never let you know, before."

One of the girls said sarcastically, "Of course, dearie, we wouldn't think of calling you a liar. But if you're such good friends, walk over and talk to him right now. Go on. Let's see you do it."

Goaded, Norma dropped the satin lining from her trembling hands. Inside the shell of her body was a seething sea of terror. She would have to walk that length of the room with all eyes on her. She would have to say something to Lon that would make him look up, *make* him smile. And what could she say? How could she carry through this awful thing she had started?

Any other girl would go wisecracking. But she wasn't like that. If she had been, she would have picked up men in dime-a-dance places. She would

have a troupe of rowdy boy friends to talk about, too, instead of bearing the brunt of all the girls' jokes.

With copper curls gleaming, with head high, she placed her feet firmly, determinedly, one in front of the other as though walking a chalk line to the designer's desk.

Standing before it, braced with two hands on its ink-splotched surface, she leaned forward toward him confidentially.

"If only he doesn't see me quake," she thought.

"Mr. Dodson." Thank Goodness there was no one near enough to hear. "Please—"

Lon raised his head, surprise in his eyes.

"Please—we girls were having a little friendly argument, and I was elected to ask you for the truth. I said your new car was the very last word F.O.B. Detroit. The others thought I was wrong and it isn't the latest. It is, isn't it? It's so beautiful, it couldn't be anything else."

That was an inspired thought. The sudden flash of white teeth in his tanned face dazzled her. The gleam of pleasure in his eyes was all she could have asked for. He pushed back his chair and rose to his feet. That would show the girls he respected her and liked her.

"You are right," he said. "I'm glad you like my car."

"Thank you. I was sure I was right." Norma tossed him a quick smile and turned away before he could do anything to spoil the effect. Her head was higher, her step lighter, as she returned to her place.

There was no giggling as she gathered the satin into her fingers. For the moment at least, the girls would let her dream her dreams in peace.

COMING to the city and looking for work had seemed like a nightmare a few short months ago when things had all gone to smash back home. Now the nightmare was in remembering all those nineteen years she had lived without knowing Lon existed. All the wasted years when she hadn't been able to see him any time she lifted her eyes; never felt that little hop of her heart before it settled back singing, just to be in the same room with him, breathe the same air. Never to have seen that square, cleft chin. Nor those smoke-gray eyes set deep under the shelf of his brows, intent, serious, but lighting his whole face as though candles had been lighted behind them when he smiled.

"Sitting on the moon with Lon." That was what Marge said when she was tormenting her. What a grand thought! What a beautiful dream! Two seats on the moon, just for them.

She wasn't asking for the moon to play with, nor to keep. Just one little ride through heaven with Lon.

Voices behind them and a light hand on Norma's shoulder brought her back to reality with a start.

"Norma, I'm putting Alva next to you. See that she catches on, will you?"

The girl nodded to her forelady and smiled up as Alva took the chair vacated next to her. Here was a girl who was different, like herself, not like all the others in the row. A girl who had seen better times, who would love handling the beautiful satins and velvets. Who would appreciate the rich, vivid colors. One who would understand that heartache wasn't funny.

Alva was quick to pick up the work, white hands flying, low voice friendly.

"I'm glad they put me next to you, Norma. I'm a stranger in town. I hope we can be friends."

It would be nice to have a friend, someone to talk to, again, Norma thought.

"I'm glad, too," she said. "I never have a chance to meet anyone outside the plant. Most of the men here are married. All but Lon Dodson. And the girls are—"

The new girl said, "I know. I've been all through it, until I met Bert, my husband. He's the new foreman in the cutting room. We'll find someone for you and have lots of good times. How about this Lon Dodson you mentioned? Your eyes say he wouldn't make a bad fourth, as far as you're concerned."

"Lon just wouldn't be interested." Norma smiled ruefully.

The other girl pulled her cheeks between her teeth and her eyes twinkled. But this was different from the kidding of the other girls.

"I'll just bet he would be interested. Any man who wouldn't see you for what you are, must be blind. Unless he's blinded by some other girl."

"There isn't anyone. I'm sure of that. He never notices girls at all."

The other girl said, "That makes it easy. I'll have Bert get acquainted and invite him up to the apartment, and of course you'll be there."

"That's Lon, down there at the desk. He designs all these boxes, makes the samples." Norma quivered with hope.

"He selected this satin that might have been woven of strands of your hair, and you say he never noticed you?" Alva said. "From where I sit on the sidelines, it looks as though all he needed was someone to steer his course for him, and I'm the little fixer who can do it."

And the "fixing" proved unbelievably easy. Bert Woodbridge found a kindred spirit in Lon. Both men were interested in the packaging of fine perfumes. Bert had ideas and Lon needed them. It took only a brief exchange of words to strike up the friendship Alva had ordered. So one night Norma found herself sitting at the Woodbridge's card table, fanning and folding her cards meticulously. Listening to the conversation, content just to hear that beloved voice, wrapped in delight at his nearness.

His quick smile of recognition and the gay lifting of his hand when he came in had made her heart jump dangerously. The way his eyes kept coming back to the gleaming mass of her hair, falling soft against the peacock blue of her rough crêpe dress, kept her heart bobbing like a cork.

Through the blur of happiness that surrounded her, Norma saw him suddenly rise, spilling his cards in a heap on the table.

"Why don't we go somewhere and dance? There's a keen orchestra at the Pink Parade. Come on." Lon holding out his hand toward her, actually asking her, Norma Saunders to go somewhere and dance with him. And the dancing itself proved that dreams do come true.

But from that night on, little white lies, especially defensive white lies, had a way of multiplying out of all proportion. Norma found herself wandering around in a maze of them. The girls at the bench prodded her with questions. Scenting a romance right under their noses, they could not let one breath of it go untouched.

Out of a few dances at the local night clubs, out of a few evenings of bridge and an occasional lift home in the new car, Norma fabricated a romance that gleamed brighter and glowed warmer than any of the shimmering material she handled. Dreams so complete and

perfect that they became real to her. Bits of smiles, and careless friendly words were cradled in her heart until they became caresses in her memory.

Out of the whir of conversation around her, sudden laughter brought Norma back from her world of dreams. There was something sinister in it and when she looked up she found amused eyes centered on her by her fellow workers. Laura was the first to start teasing.

"When you goin' to announce your engagement to Lon, Miss High Hat? Of course you'll ask us to the party."

Norma stared, startled.

A girl named Helen picked up the thread of sarcasm.

"Maybe she won't announce it at a party. Maybe she'll just come in with a diamond like a headlight of that new car she seems to think is half hers already."

Norma dropped her eyes to her bare left hand. Would she ever have a ring to wear on that finger? If only she did. If only she could hold it up to these girls who taunted her. She wouldn't ask for a diamond like a headlight. All she wanted was one that was flawless, as love should be, held high in golden clutching fingers.

"What was it Lon said when you kidded him?" Laura's eyes were on Norma as she asked the question of Helen.

Helen laughed gloatingly. "I just asked him if he was goin' to send me an invitation to his wedding, and you should have seen him. He was fit to be tied. 'Wedding?' he said. 'What wedding?' And I said, 'Why, yours and Norma Saunders' of course.' Was his face red? I thought he'd blow up."

The girls all laughed, the cruel titter.

Marge urged Helen on. "Then what'd he say?"

"He laughed and said something about there not being any girl in this part of the world he'd even look at. Said he'd show us a real gal from his old home town one of these days. And he said we'd all be invited to the wedding sure enough."

Norma longed for Alva. But her friend had been moved to the other end of the table. She was alone, stripped, defenseless. She wanted to crawl into one of the great packing cases and be nailed up and shipped away, as far away as the ends of the earth.

But the girls were waiting for her to say something and with stiff lips she managed a smile that passed for scoffing. With lightning quick decision she tossed off a light reply.

"Naturally he'd say that. I told you he was shy. That's just part of his protective covering. You'll all be invited all right. I've even got my wedding dress planned."

"Really! Tell us about it," someone asked, in a more friendly tone.

There had been the ring of truth to what Norma had said. She *had* planned her wedding gown. Planned it until she dropped asleep with a smile on her lips, night after night. The shimmering purity of white satin, the virginal aureole of white tulle, the fragrant halo of orange blossoms—

WITH lips still stiff, with her heart a shaking mass of jelling fear and despair, Norma maneuvered to be outside at just the right moment after work. Driven by the watching eyes of the other girls, she walked straight to Lon's parked car. But before she could turn the handle of the door, his hand was there to turn it for her. Strong fingers cupped her elbow, gay eyes smiled into hers, making that sticky

mass that was her heart melt until it ran in turbulent streams through every vein in her body.

"You're just the one I wanted to see, Norma. Let's shake Alva and Bert and drive out to Heartland to dance tonight. It's a big night. Guy Wertman's orchestra and everybody in their best duds. Not a bad place to celebrate."

"Celebrate?" she repeated the magic word.

"Sure. I put over that new perfume box I was working on. Thanks to that blue dress you wore with those bright curls against it. It means a nice bonus for me."

Norma slid deep in the leather seat of the roadster. He wanted her to celebrae with him! Just the two of them alone, and at a swanky place like Heartland! Surely the magnet of her love was drawing him to her at last.

And so with those gleaming curls caught high, in a hair-do that rivaled most of the carefully sculptured coiffures of Heartland's regular patrons and with her one glamorous evening frock a swirling sea of translucent sea-nymph green, Norma danced in Lon's arms. The laughter in his eyes lifted her heart, the strength of his arm lifted her body. This was the ride through heaven that she'd wanted. The two of them alone in an improbable beautiful world—one all their own.

And then the shining dance floor was behind them. That encircling arm had taken her through the heart-shaped arch that led to starlit gardens beyond. Strong hands gathered both of hers; burning eyes pleading under the dark shelf of his brows; the beloved voice striving incoherently to reveal his heart.

Norma lifted eager, tempting lips, as soft as the gown she wore, for the inevitable kiss she had waited for so long. A kiss that would say so many things that could never be put into words.

With a quick move he had her in his arms, held close against his breast as only a lover could hold her. The passion of his lips, closing over hers, made her place on the moon beside him secure.

How long that kiss lasted, how deep into her being it sank, Norma never knew. But suddenly it was being crushed like a beautiful and fragile blossom. Bruising fingers were on her arms. And then his hands relaxed, dropped away. With his head bowed, Lon spoke in a voice that was scarcely audible.

"I'm so sorry, Norma. Can you forget it?"

"Sorry? Forget?" She repeated the words incredulously. Could she forget to live? Could she forget to— Then she laughed softly. Was Lon old-fashioned enough to think she'd mind being kissed? Was the innate courtesy she adored in him, so deep that he thought he had insulted her with that kiss?

She lifted soft fingers to touch the smooth hair at his temples. "It's all right. So *very* all right."

His answer was a groan. "But it isn't all right. You're being decent about it, but I had no right. Oh, you don't know what torture it is to be lonesome. It seems to drive a man mad sometimes. I've wanted Dessa so badly, for a moment I forgot she was hundreds of miles away. All I knew was that I had to kiss her, and you were there."

Norma was grateful for the darkness that hid her quivering mouth, her stricken eyes. That kiss—a living, pulsing promise—had been for Dessa, though it had been laid on her lips. And he thought she didn't know what torture was!

"Tell me about Dessa." It was a gallant effort.

Lon swung eagerly toward her, his head lifted. His hands gathered hers again.

"That's what I wanted to do. That's why I asked you to come out here tonight to dance. I wanted to ask you to help me out. You've been a swell pal these last few weeks and now I want you to be a pal to Dessa, too. She wants to come here for a week or two. She wants to see Lanchworth, get acquainted with the people I know so she won't feel so strange when she comes back to be married next month. I thought maybe she could stay with you. She's such a sheltered little thing, she couldn't stay at a hotel. She isn't the kind who can take care of herself."

Norma realized that she had been holding her breath ever since Lon started to talk. Now she released it and came back to life. She had to go on living, go on pretending. But how could she, now that hope was gone? How could she go on working, facing the jeering of the girls? How could she find courage to let Dessa come into her apartment where she had dreamed her lovely dreams? How could she see Lon with her, loving her, and go on living?

NORMA'S fingers tightened around Alva's as she felt the shell she'd built up against grief and desperation slowly giving away.

"Chin up. It'll hurt only a little while." Alva's whispered words were meant to be helpful, but having your heart pulled wasn't like having a tooth out. There was no anesthetic which could stop that pain, no blessed relief ahead. Nothing but a great aching void, and in another minute a train would rumble into the station and the light of expectancy in Lon's eyes would change to tender love.

"Oh, Alva, I can't!" It was a choked little cry. "I can't go through with any of it. It isn't human to expect it of me."

The other girl's voice was soft, but it had a compelling quality. Her words were as stern as the fingers that gripped Norma's.

"You can't do anything else, not and be you. It's things like this that show what we're made of. Look!"

The train had slowed to a stop and Lon was swinging a little figure free of the train step.

For just an instant Norma looked, then she closed her eyes, squinged them shut. But she could not keep them shut, for Lon's laughing voice was beside her.

"This is Dessa. Isn't she cute? You'll love her as much as I do."

Norma's clear blue eyes went wide with wonder. This girl was just a child, all pink and white and taffy-colored fluff. Until you saw her eyes, and then you knew. She was as old as the ages, as wise as a serpent and just as cunning.

Dessa held out both hands. "And you're Norma. I'd know from what Lon wrote me. I never suspected he could write so eloquently about anything as he did about your hair. He never said such nice things about me. At least not to me." Dessa pouted prettily and Lon caught her against him with a murmured, "You're the prettiest kid in all the world."

The four of them had reached the car now and Alva turned away.

"I'll skip along. I've got to meet Bert and I'll just leave the three of you to decide which two makes the best company." She squeezed Norma's fingers and slipped away.

What had she meant? Alva was pretty smart. Did she have any idea Lon would ever change? Could she even imagine it, after seeing his pleasure at being with Dessa?

When he finally left them, Dessa whirled around the little apartment, exclaiming at the minuteness of the kitchenette. She was a little awed by the immaculate neatness, which she immediately proceeded to change. Her own things began to scatter almost immediately.

"Lon's going to take me to dance tonight, and we're taking you along." Dessa looked up from the traveling case she was unpacking. "Some place called Heartland. Doesn't that sound romantic? I think I ought to wear this pink dress, don't you? Lon likes me best in sweet innocent things."

So it was all a pose, Norma thought. A smoke screen to hide—what?

The sharp retort she had started to make about being "taken along" anywhere, changed to a smiling nod. She'd look into things a little further. The frothy frock Dessa held against her looked like a strawberry soda and in contrast her own new evening frock would make Norma look a million years older. Just as she felt. Just as she probably acted. But Lon had admired her. Otherwise why had he written Dessa about her hair? He had liked her taste in clothes, else why had he used her choice of colors in designing the box that had brought him the bonus?

Hope refused to die in her heart. She could still try to win the artist in him by glorifying herself even though the man in him turned eagerly to little girl innocence of Dessa's sort. Perhaps she could even put up a fight.

Together the two girls dressed. Dessa chattering, Norma silent, listening and thinking hard.

"You'll be my bridesmaid, Norma. And you can help me select my trousseau. It'll be fun having all the money I want to spend on it. Lon said the sky was the limit." The high, lilting voice changed abruptly, became hard. "I'll get enough stuff to last me, 'cause maybe he won't be so generous after we're married."

Norma frowned. "You mean Lon's going to buy your trousseau? You'd let him?"

"And why not? What's the difference whether he buys me a wedding gown the day before we're married or an evening gown the day after? I believe in getting while the getting's good. Men can be worked a lot easier when they want something than when they think they've got it. And Lon's no different from any other man."

Bewildered, heartsick, Norma continued to adjust the lovely dress she wore. A cloud of glory it was, of mist gray crêpe, molded to her slim figure in classic lines. A solid band of rhinestones from waist to hem glittered as the only ornament except the bright gold of her hair. Then she opened the door to let Lon into the little living room she could no longer call all hers.

NORMA'S fingers, next day, gathered the satin lining and her forehead gathered in a frown that was becoming a habit since Dessa had come to share her apartment. Lon's shirt-sleeved shoulders were just as wide, just as beloved, though they sagged a little over his desk and his head was no longer a smooth, shining disk. Restless fingers rumpled his hair and there was a hunted look in his eyes when he did look up. Ideas and dollars have a habit of eluding one when they are stalked too deliberately and Lon needed to keep both rolling to pay the ever

mounting bills Dessa was running.

It might be as Dessa said, good for a man's soul to keep him grinding. But that wasn't all. While Lon worked all day, while Norma was away, the other girl wasn't sitting home reading fairy tales as her sweetheart thought she was. There had been matinées with the elderly widower in apartment ten, elaborate boxes of candy, expensive flowers. And all-day jaunts into the country with Bibs Hanson, the sax player from Heartland.

The baby stare had turned to a haughty glare when Norma had taken her to task about it. "Why shouldn't I have fun, anywhere I can get it?" Dessa had snapped. "Does Lon expect to hole up the rest of his life and never have any fun? If men like my company and want to pay for it, I'd be a fool to say 'No, it isn't nice.' There's no fun in being nice. It's much more fun to be naughty. Try it some time and see."

Norma let the material drop from her fingers, now, and rose abruptly. Almost before she knew what she was going to do, she was making her way to Lon's desk. It was near quitting time anyway. But even when she got there, what could she do? Somehow he

"Come on, let's eat. I'm not going to wait all night for my supper"

had to know. But fighting for what she wanted mustn't include telling tales.

Her voice was low, firm, when she stopped at his desk. There was no longer any quaking with fear. They were friends.

"Listen, Lon, you can't get anywhere this way. You haven't had a worthwhile idea since Dessa came. At least not an idea that will make a box. Get yourself together and send her home for a while. You'll need six months of hard labor to bring your bank account out of the red enough to start paying rent, to say nothing of the other things you'll have to pay."

Six months. Her heart was repeating the two little words. If she could have six months, she could make him forget the other girl and her kittenish ways.

He ran his fingers through his hair again and started stuffing things into his desk.

She went on. "That will give you a chance to get back on your feet. A chance to know whether you really want Dessa or not."

Lon swung around, pushed his chair back.

"I know now. That's the whole thing. All I can think about is what she's doing all day while I'm tied up here. I keep thinking of all the good times I should be showing her instead of leaving her alone so much. She's such a child." His eyes softened. "Oh, you do undersand, don't you, Norma? She isn't like you, able to take care of herself, able to amuse herself, you know."

Norma closed her teeth to keep back the words she wanted to shout and dared not. The things she might say and must not.

"Come on, we'll pick up Dessa and go out to Crandall's for a swell dinner and dance till morning. What do I care if it takes the last dollar I've got? Tomorrow's payday."

Norma slid deep in the roadster. Since the other girl had come she had been pushed into the outer corner. Now she let her shoulder touch Lon's companionably.

"Lon—how long have you known Dessa?" It was a whispered little question.

He laughed. "Not long. About a year. She wasn't out of her highchair before that."

Norma gathered her courage. She had such pitiful little weapons to fight with. "And most of that year you've been here, away from her. Do you think you can really love someone so soon?"

Lon pulled the car to the curb and turned to her. He took both her hands in his.

"What are you driving at? Love isn't a thing that has to grow, inch by inch, like a tree. I loved her the moment I saw her, only—"

Norma let her hands rest in his, afraid to move for fear he would release them.

"Only what?" Hope breathed the words.

"Well, things haven't gone just the way I figured they would. I thought the things she needed, a wedding dress and a veil and a few pretties would cost a week's pay, maybe two. I didn't figure things ran up quite so high."

Norma was silent, remembering the piles of frothy lingerie, the extravagant frills and furbelows that cluttered her bedroom nowadays. Things that Dessa would never need in a little home with Lon.

He gave Norma's fingers a little friendly squeeze before he started the car. "You do understand everything, don't you?"

She nodded. She'd rather not understand as much as she did.

The apartment was empty when they went in. A frivolous novel lay spread-eagled on the rug. Furry slippers rested where they had been kicked off. A huge box of candy lay open on the gateleg table.

Lon's eyes traveled over the untidy intimate details, and then he laughed. "She's probably gone for a walk." He fingered the satin ribbon on the candy box. "Nice candy someone sends you, Norma. Who is he?"

She was standing close to him, so close she could feel the vitality of him. It made her tingle all over. Before she could check the indignant answer, it was out. "She hasn't gone for a walk. And that candy isn't mine. It's Dessa's."

"What do you mean, she hasn't gone for a walk? Where has she gone?"

"She goes places. Matinées—"

"That's an idea," he said. "A harmless enough way for her to amuse herself. She probably won't be long. Hurry and change so we can go as soon as she comes."

When Norma reappeared, freshly groomed and gloriously lovely, he said: "Dessa's awfully late. I'm half starved." He reached for a candy in the now half-empty box. "Good candy. Better than I can afford to buy her. Does she buy it for herself?"

"Men send it to her. Now you know," Norma blurted out.

"What men?"

"The ones who take her places."

Lon's eyes narrowed. He was all man now. A tense, jealous male. "If you were a man, saying things like that, I'd—"

"If I were a man"—Norma caught the sob in her voice and strangled it into indignation—"I wouldn't care what happened to you. If I were a man I'd probably say, 'If he's fool enough to marry her, let him take the consequences.' But I'm just a girl—a girl who loves you so terribly that I can't —can't let you spoil your life and mine."

His mood seemed to have changed. He had relaxed and his eyes had found their old lighted laughter.

"You don't know what you're saying. You just don't understand Dessa."

This was too much. Norma's fists were clenched, now, her nerves were taut.

"Everyone knows that gifts such as Dessa gets are not given without a reason. She knows it, too."

Norma turned away. What had she done? What had she said? She had lost even his friendship now. He'd never want to see her again.

But quick hands caught her shoulders, turning her back to face him.

He said, "You're right about Dessa. But I thought being with you would improve her. She's a cute kid to play around with, and she'd be just as cute for a toy wife. If a guy made a million a year. But she's an expensive plaything, I've found."

He jingled the coins in his pocket thoughtfully for a moment. "Gosh, I had an idea I was making pretty good money. Enough for a little house, nice clothes for a wife, a good time once or twice a week, the car I wanted. And now I'll be lucky if I can keep the car in gasoline."

Norma studied Lon without moving. His firm hands still rested on her shoulders, his eyes were sober, questioning. The seed had been planted and even if love didn't grow inch by inch, doubt did.

With quick impatience, he turned away. "Come on, let's eat. I'm not go-

ing to wait all night for my supper. We'll go, you and I."

Norma laughed softly. Perhaps her hour had come.

"I've a better idea. Dinner right here. Grilled chops, French fries, an upside down cake with gobs of whipped cream. Home cooked in less time than it will take to drive to Crandall's. Wouldn't you like that, after lunchrooms and restaurants?"

Without waiting for an answer, she snapped on the lights in the kitchenette, started pulling things from the tiny refrigerator. There was scarcely room for two in the miniature room but Lon managed to squeeze in, too, and to make himself a helpful nuisance. But Norma had no complaints to make. Playing house was the oldest game in the world, and one that could pay the longest odds to the winner.

Well fed, content, with only the two creamy candles on the table for illumination, Lon and Norma were just finishing their supper when the door burst open and Dessa whirled in, hatless and coatless. She stopped short at the picture before her.

"Well! Isn't this something? Sorry if I'm intruding. Perhaps I'd better go out to the drugstore and phone for an appointment." There was nothing babyish about the glitter in her eyes. The kittenish ways had grown quite catty.

Lon rose to his feet.

"Where have you been all this time?" His voice was gruff. The laughter he had shared with Norma belonged to them alone.

Dessa tapped an uneasy foot but she held her ground. Danger changed her quickly enough from a child to a woman. "Wouldn't you like to know? And why should I tell you where I've been, when you can have nice little tête-à-têtes with Norma? I suppose this sort of thing has been going on right along. That's why you wanted me to stay with her, so you could still see her, still dance with her. You pretended she was just going along with us, when all the time—"

Lon's eyes were hard. His hand closed over the girl's slim arm but his voice was smooth and easy when he spoke.

"Don't be foolish, Dessa. You're acting like a spoiled child and it isn't cute. I was really worried, that's why I asked. If anything should happen to you—"

With a sinking heart Norma saw the other girl soften, heard the cooing voice as she melted into the man's waiting arms.

"Oh, Lonny, darling, I was only visiting the nice old lady in Apartment Ten. She and I had tea and toast and marmalade. I didn't know you were coming tonight and she loves to have me keep her company."

Almost Norma cried out in indignation. Almost she blurted the truth. Apartment Ten was where Mr. Elerbee, the elderly widower, lived alone. But she choked the words back. What was the use? She had spoken her piece once and got no thanks for it. Lon liked her as a friend, but he loved Dessa. Quite enough to forgive and forget, even to blame himself for having doubts.

LON had just been let in on Saturday afternoon and Dessa was showing off the new sports suit that was to be part of her trousseau when a persistent ringing of the doorbell made Norma fling the door wide.

"Package, miss." The uniformed man touched his cap and set the large box inside the door.

"Wedding presents already. Where do you suppose it's from?" Dessa squealed with delight and dropped to her knees, tugging at the cords that bound it.

Lon watched her with steady eyes. "What makes you think it's a wedding present? After all, Norma lives here, too. Couldn't it be something for her?"

Dessa looked up like a disappointed child, then she searched for the label. "Miss Norma Saunders. It is for you. What do you suppose it is?"

Norma shook her head. "We'll soon see. Help me untie it."

Lon's knife was already out of his pocket and he snipped the cords expertly. "I'm curious, too, Norma. I did think it might be a wedding present. I told the fellows at the plant I was going to be married. I thought maybe it was from the crowd."

It was Norma's turn to droop.

"You mean you told them? They know, at the plant, that you're marrying Dessa?" Green and orange worlds spun dizzily around her head. They had to know in time of course. But could she live through Monday and what it was bound to bring?

"Gosh, that's right," Lon said. "I guess I did forget to tell them that. I guess maybe I just said I was getting married. A fellow kind of trips over himself about these things, doesn't he?"

While they had been talking Dessa had plunged her hands deep in the tissue that bedded the contents and now she brought them out, holding aloft a gleaming hostess set. Tucked between the pieces was a large white envelope.

Lon rescued the tray from Dessa's careless hands, but she snatched the envelope. She tore it open before anyone could stop her.

She read it through twice before she rose slowly to her feet and handed it to Norma.

"So you didn't know what was in it?" Dess asked. "What kind of a joke is this anyway? I'm about fed up. But if you think, Lon Dodson, that you can make a fool of me, you're mistaken. I'll make you marry me!" She dashed into the bedroom, and slammed the door behind her.

Norma read the note through, too, silently, with burning eyes in a burning face. Over her shoulder, Lon scanned it.

> To Lon and Norma:
> May we wish you luck and happiness? We did a lot of kidding but we always knew you two would have to end up at the altar. We wouldn't have it any other way.
> The whole gang.

Slowly Lon turned her around so he could look into her eyes.

"What do you make of it, Norma?" His voice was low, vibrant. "The gang sent the wedding present to you. They wish *you* and *me* happiness. Why do they think that you're the bride?"

She was a long time answering. The green and orange worlds had stopped spinning. They were crashing around her now.

"Has anyone any reason to think it was you I cared about?" Lon's voice was gentle, kind. And that made it all the harder to bear. The hands that still rested on her shoulders moved gently to draw her against him.

Still she could not answer. She could not admit that she had told them so. Her little white lies that had saved her face had come back like a boomerang when she was more defenseless than ever.

His voice went on evenly, "You aren't going to lie to me, too, are you, Norma? Just when I was beginning to realize what a fool I'd been. Having

one girl lying to me, one girl playing me for a sucker, is about all I can take at once. Don't tell me you're going to fail me, too."

"But Dessa?" The words were scarcely audible, there in the circle of his arms. "She won't let you go. She said so."

Lon laughed softly, holding her closer.

"She can't make me do anything, thanks to the little word you dropped in my ear last night. Oh, Norma, I'll bless you for it always. You see, dear, when I went out last night, there was a light burning in Apartment Ten and the door was partly open. I thought I'd thank the little old lady for being kind to Dessa.

"Well, you know what I found. The tenant in Apartment Ten had been a little too kind. The sort of kindness that a fellow like me resents. Anyway, why are we bothering to talk about Dessa, when we'd so much rather talk about us?"

Lon's eyes, gleaming as though candles had been lighted behind them, smiled into the clear blue ones that met his. But his lips meeting hers lifted them both to the place on the moon reserved forever just for them.

Next Week:

Desperate Journey

By ELISABETH PETERSON

Troubled by Constipation?

Get relief this simple, pleasant way!

1. TAKE ONE or two tablets of Ex-Lax before retiring. It tastes just like delicious chocolate. No spoons, no bottles! No fuss, no bother! Ex-Lax is easy to use and pleasant to take!

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EX-LAX ***The Original Chocolated Laxative***

Was it a hangover? A groom in evening clothes and a bride in a long veil at eight-thirty in the morning?

The Morning After

By MARY BURTON

THE tense, angry voice caught Claire's ear. "In plain words, this is blackmail. Do you realize that?"

Claire set her coffee cup down carefully on the yellow breakfast plate and glanced at the yellow wall of her kitchenette. That was the trouble with this apartment. Her kitchenette adjoined the living room of Rubye, night club hostess, and she could hear everything that went on, whether she

wanted to or not. But the place was within walking distance of downtown, so she kept on living there.

"So what?" Rubye's voice came lazily, and Claire could picture her lounging back in her green divan, her green eyes half closed, her hair a black fan above her white face.

"It just happens that I won't stand for it," the man replied.

A familiar note in the voice rang an echo in Claire's mind. That phrase, "It just happens," belonged to— It couldn't be!

"How did I get here, anyway?" the man's voice went on.

Claire felt her heart tighten and grow still. It was his voice. It was.

She had no right to listen. She rose and started for the living room, but she heard Rubye laugh, a malicious chuckle.

"Doesn't matter how you got here," she pointed out. "Your problem is how you're going to get away. You can't walk haughtily down the street at eight o'clock in the morning, in full dress suit. Your fiancée wouldn't like the publicity."

"So that's your game. If I don't pay your price, you'll drag my fiancée into it."

"Exactly, my Social Register friend. And if I know that stiff-necked father of hers, this little scandal will blow your chances of marrying the girl sky-high."

Rubye's voice changed abruptly. "Snap out of it, fella! Come across. You'll never miss the money."

Claire walked into her living room and stood there, her brown eyes sparkling, her cheeks a brilliant pink. She felt her head throb, felt her whole body begin to vibrate with anger.

"Why should I care?" she asked herself. "He owns half the real estate in New York, and I'm just the publicity director for the Bride's Shop in West's Department Store. And if I don't get some better publicity pretty soon I won't be even that."

It was ridiculous to tremble like this. You didn't fall in love with a man you had spoken to only twice. Not when you were nineteen years old and had been on your own in New York for three whole years. You had to know the answers. You had to know that a man like James Harvey Nash marries a girl from his own social world. If you didn't—well, you ended up like Rubye in the next apartment.

"Anyway," she sighed, "what can I do?"

She opened her wardrobe door, and there, hanging mistily white and shimmering in the early light, was the white bridal dress and veil she had brought home the night before. She had tried, vainly, to get from it some inspiration for a publicity stunt.

She heard the echo of Rubye's words: "Your fiancée wouldn't like the publicity." *Publicity.*

An idea crashed over Claire, leaving her high-pitched with excitement. Why not? she asked herself excitedly. Why not try it?

She ran to the kitchenette and listened. "The newspaper men will be here in a few minutes," she heard Rubye say. "I told them that James Harvey Nash had a story for them. I didn't say what kind. You can still get out of this if you'll give me that money."

"Do your worst," the man replied. "I won't be held up."

Claire ran back into her bedroom. Quickly she tore off her house robe, donned the white satin dress, found white satin slippers, touched her

cheeks with powder and drew the soft white veil over her head. She went to her easel in the corner, penciled a message in soft black crayon, then rolled the paper into a scroll and tied it with a satin ribbon.

She walked into the hall, down to Rubye's door, and rang the bell. The next moment the door was flung wide.

CLAIRE stood there in her misty bridal veil, smiling. Her brown hair waved softly about her face, her white skin shone like the petal of a gardenia, her cheeks were pink and her curved lips were red as cherries. In her hand she carried the scroll as a bride carries a prayer book.

She saw Rubye fall back, gaping. She turned to James Harvey Nash.

His gray eyes were filled with amazement, yet they held hers, searching, asking. His mouth was stern, but as she smiled at him she saw it relax. They stood there looking at each other, and in that instant Claire knew that her life had changed. Whatever came to her of happiness or unhappiness would come through this man.

As this flashed through her mind, a noise in the hall brought her back to the present. She spoke to him rapidly. "If you'll come with me, I'll get you out of this."

"Say—" began Rubye, but James pushed her to one side. "What must I do?" he asked Claire.

"There isn't time to explain," she said. "You and I will parade down the hall to meet the photographers and news men, first."

The sound of voices was clearer now. James hesitated a moment; then he held out his arm to her. She put her hand in the bend of his elbow and they started down the hall together.

They faced the flash of cameras, the questions of reporters; then Claire, guiding James by the pressure of her hand, walked serenely down the stairs to the street. As they started along the sidewalk crowds began to follow them. After all, a bride in a long veil, a man in a dress suit, at eight-thirty in the morning!

Presently James turned and looked at Claire. "I don't want to presume, nor be too inquisitive," he said, "but —are we getting married? It would be nice to know."

Claire laughed. "I'm a publicity expert," she answered.

They reached the West Department store at last. Claire stopped, turned and faced the cameras and reporters, with James beside her, smiling now. She unrolled her scroll. The newsmen gasped, then laughed good-naturedly as they read:

Let the Bride's Shop plan your trousseau.

James looked at her. "Thanks for rescuing me," he said, and his eyes paid her tribute.

"Goodby." Claire turned abruptly to go into the store. Yes, she had rescued him. For what? For the doll-faced girl of the Sunday supplement. She must remember that. She must keep on getting the right answers.

He put out his hand. "Don't go yet. Can't we go somewhere and talk? I'd like to thank you where we have a little more privacy."

"Don't bother." *He belonged to another world. He belonged to another woman.*

"But you can't go like this," he protested. "Have dinner with me this evening? Dance afterward?"

For a moment Claire hesitated, but his eyes were holding her, asking; and

she knew then that whatever he asked of her she would give.

"All right." She nodded. "Phone me later." And she trailed up the store aisle, to the Bride's Shop.

THE evening paper carried pictures of her and James, with a good-natured story of the morning's stunt. She had played her rôle; it was time to step out of his life, for safety's sake. But danger could be sweet!

What would please him, she wondered, as she glanced over her frocks. A bronze metal, she decided, for bronze brought out the topaz of her hair and the yellow in her brown eyes. Bronze slippers fitted her slender feet, and topaz gleamed on her arms and shone in her ears.

It was wonderful, sitting across the table from him in the restaurant, with flowers, perfume and the jewels of women for a sumptuous background. But that was nothing to the thrill of dancing in his arms, shut out from all the world.

Nothing had ever stirred her as the touch of him stirred her. She had always kept a hard crust around her heart, worn a brittle smile to ward off too eager attentions, but against this man she had no defense. His low laugh filled her ears, his gray eyes commanded hers until she dropped her eyes to his lips, and found herself wondering what his kiss would be like.

A wild abandon swept over her. Tonight was hers, no matter what came after. Tonight they were together, his arms were around her, and before he left her, she knew his lips would be on hers.

A slow smile curved her mouth as she glided across the floor with him, their steps fitted to the pattern of the music. She knew from the way his eyes caressed her face, knew from his touch that he, too, felt the warm sweet spell of passion.

The minutes, the hours, passed swiftly. Then he was taking her home, his shoulder touching hers as they sat close together in the car.

They stepped into her apartment and the soft half-darkness enclosed them. Only one small light was burning on a table.

He turned, took her in his arms and held her close. She felt his lips tender, burning. She closed her eyes, giving herself up to the wild, tempestuous music which swept through her. There was a drumming in her ears, a flame before her closed eyes.

"Darling—darling." His voice was just a whisper.

Her arms around his neck pressed him closer. She lay against him in surrender.

"Hello!" A figure walked out from the bedroom and switched on the overhead light, flooding the room.

Claire felt James' arms drop away from her. She turned, and as she saw the man standing by the light switch, she felt something within her quiver and die.

"Frank!"

"You said it, Kid." The man looked at her out of sharp black eyes, his heavy face twisted with a grin. He reached into the pocket of his coat, brought out a crumpled cigarette and lighted it.

Claire stood rigid. Her heart seemed to have stopped beating; her mind had stopped thinking. She could only stare at this specter out of her past.

"May I ask who this person is?" James asked. His face was a grim mask.

"I just happen to be her husband,"

Frank answered for her, blowing out a puff of smoke.

James' eyes darkened; his mouth straightened into a hard line. "Is this true?" he asked.

She tried to speak, but her throat was too tight. She could only nod assent.

"Sorry to intrude, of course." Frank was leaning against the wall, watching them with enjoyment. "But it was a shock to me, seeing my wife in another man's arms."

He threw his cigarette on the rug, crushed it under his heel. "Maybe you think my hurt feelings are worth something?" he asked, looking at James.

"Frank!" Claire found her voice. "How dare you, how *dare* you?"

"Don't bother," James cut in, his face white, his eyes blazing. "Don't put on an act. I get it. You saw the neat bit of business Rubye was about to do for herself and you muscled in. What a sucker I turned out to be!"

Claire looked at him as he stood there, so righteous in his anger, and felt a flood of indignation rising within her.

"There's a name for this game you two are playing," James went on. "It's an old game, but it's always good."

Frank was grinning. "Glad you see my point. Now if you'll just get out your checkbook—"

James' face twisted in anger; then he laughed, raspingly harshly. "I'm always willing to pay for what I get," he said, "and I got some very valuable information out of this experience."

He reached inside his coat, drew out his checkbook and began unscrewing the top of his pen.

Claire's anger had reached its high peak now. She found herself suddenly steady, suddenly unafraid.

"Get out," she said quietly. "Both of you get out and stay out." She crossed to the door and held it open.

"You can't kid me!" Frank's voice was ugly. "You and this guy—"

"Stop it!" Her voice shot at him like a weapon. "You two cowards, insulting a woman! Fighting over me! I want to be clean of both of you."

James was looking at her, a long searching look. "You admit you are married to him?"

"Yes, I admit it."

"Then why didn't you mention, just casually, that you had a husband when I took you to dinner, when I held you in my arms?"

"I forgot about him."

He stared at her; then he laughed his rasping laugh again. "I see. That makes it all beautifully clear. You just forgot you had a husband."

"Yes," she said calmly, "I did."

He stood looking at her a moment longer; then, without speaking, he took Frank's arm and pushed him ahead of him out of the room.

Claire slammed the door behind them, then threw herself into a chair. The pain came, stabbing and tearing at her heart. James had believed this of her! Believed she was willing to lure a man with her body to extort money from him.

Then when the storm of anger was spent, she set her lips resolutely. "I've fought my way alone before, and I can do it again," she said.

BUT she did not really believe that she would have to. Surely he would remember to believe in her. Surely he would phone.

But the hours went by and he did not call; the days went by and he did not come to see her.

When she opened her Sunday paper,

his face smiled out at her, and beside it was the face of his fiancée. The girl was pretty, Claire admitted it, but there was something about the close-set eyes that she did not like. "This happy young couple," the caption under the picture read, "will have four homes from which to choose. One in New York—"

She turned the page. If she could only shut him out of her life as easily!

Women had never been so hard to please, Claire thought, as she helped prospective brides choose silken underwear and velvet lounging robes. At the end of each day she came home tired, exhausted. Why should she go on? she wondered. Why go on just breathing and sleeping and walking about, when inside her it was all just one dull ache?

Then one evening when she arrived at her apartment he was waiting for her on the sidewalk. He stood there, distinguished in his excellent dinner clothes, slightly mocking. "Take you to dinner?" he asked.

She glanced down at her dress. The hyacinth blue duvetyne fitted her slender body smoothly and showed the rounded fullness of her breasts. Her slender feet were shod in blue shoes. Her hands were soft and white, and finger tips shining.

But the memory of their last meeting flooded over her and she shook her head. "No."

He took hold of her arm and guided her firmly to his car. Unless she struggled and kicked she could not resist him.

He headed away from town, out into the country where the houses were sparsely placed along the roadside. He did not speak, but drove in swift silence. Claire looked at his profile, clear-cut and strong, and relaxed against the seat. She would not think ahead, she would not remember the past, she would just enjoy sitting by him, riding along in the soft air.

Presently he turned the car back toward town. He put his arm along the back of the seat and let it fall about her shoulders, driving expertly with one hand. She leaned against him, finding the silence sweet.

At last he slowed down in front of an inn on the edge of town. "Let's have dinner here," he suggested, and she nodded assent.

Not until she was seated at a small table near the window did Claire remember that this was the Red Cock Inn where Rubye sang. The girl gave them a mocking smile across the room.

She turned back to James and found him amused. "Your friend is trying to guess the answer," he remarked.

"So am I," Claire said, smiling also. "I'm still wondering how you came to be in her room."

He quirked an eyebrow. "A party of us came here just as the place was closing, and she offered to take us to her apartment for a cocktail. Of course I don't *know* that the young lady put something in my drink, but I certainly went to sleep and stayed that way until morning."

Claire turned back toward the room, her heart suddenly light.

"It's your turn now," he said. "What about this husband of yours that you—forgot?"

"It's simple. I was terribly unhappy at home and wanted to come to New York. But I was only sixteen and my mother and stepfather wouldn't let me unless I married Frank so he could take care of me. He wasn't so repulsive then, and I married him to get away. But on the train I suddenly saw him as he really is, and when we

reached the city I gave him the slip and disappeared."

"Poor kid," he murmured.

"I was alone in New York with no friends and almost no money, but I got along. I haven't seen Frank for two years. He must have seen the pictures of you and me in the paper. He picked a lock and got into the apartment, and tried to make you think you were in a trap.

"I could get an annulment, I've never lived with him. But I've been so busy, and it didn't seem to matter until now. That evening when you—took me in your arms, I really did forget about him because—because—"

"Because you love me." His voice came low and tender.

"Yes," she said, "because I love you."

The waiter interrupted them again, and when he went away James began telling her about his plans for a yacht race, about a trip to South America one of his friends had made. He did not go back to the matter of love.

Resentment began to grow in her again. He had led her to admit her love for him, but he had not declared his in return; he had said nothing of marriage.

Marriage! But she had forgotten his fiancée. She seemed to have a way of forgetting such trivial things as fiancées and husbands.

Then they danced, and at the spell of his touch her resentment faded. "This is love," she thought. "Whatever it brings, this is love."

THEY sat at the little table and talked and danced again. The dancers grew fewer, the dining room emptied, but they did not notice.

Then, abruptly, James looked at his watch. "We must go." When they reached her apartment, she gave him her key and they came in together. Only one small light burned on a table. But this time he did not take her in his arms.

He watched as she turned on the shaded lights. Then they sat together on the divan and talked; talked of things that did not matter, because they did not dare to talk of the things that filled their hearts.

Without being told, Claire knew that he was saying goodby. He belonged to another world; he belonged to another woman. She had known that at first, but she had forgotten it.

So they sat and talked of little things that did not matter, while the hours slipped by. They did not notice that the darkness had begun to give way to a deep gray, then to a lighter gray.

Suddenly Claire looked out of the window. "Why, it's morning!" she cried. She glanced down at her blue duvetyn dress of the afternoon and evening before. "I'll put on a house coat and make you some coffee. Then you must go."

"Yes," he said gravely, "I must go."

It took her just a moment to put on the soft yellow house coat and tie the cord about her waist. James stood in the kitchenette watching her put on the coffee and get out the cups. Vaguely she heard Rubye stirring in the next apartment, but she was listening to James, looking at him; because soon he must go and she would not hear his voice, or see him again.

They sat down at the little table to drink their coffee. They were silent now, for their time was almost up.

The doorbell rang, and with its shrill clamor Claire felt a tremor of fear. She went into the living room,

opened the door and faced Rubye.

The girl's green eyes were sparkling maliciously. "I can hear as well from my side of the wall as you can from yours," she said. "You spoiled my game the other morning, so today when I heard James in here I did a little phoning. Here are some visitors."

She stood back, and Claire saw an elderly man and a girl. The girl was James' fiancée.

As she faced the two of them, Claire began to realize that it was seven-thirty in the morning, that she was in her house robe and that James stood just behind her in dinner clothes, a breakfast napkin in his hand.

The elderly man looked at them, his eyes glittering. "I wanted to see for myself, and have my daughter see, what's going on here," he said in his cold formal voice.

James took a quick step forward. "I don't like your implication, sir." His voice was controlled, but Claire could feel the anger in it.

"Implication, nothing!" the girl said, and Claire saw that her close-set eyes were looking down her pointed nose. She was no longer pretty; she looked a thorough vixen. "Do you deny," she demanded, "that you spent the night here in this room with this girl?"

James hesitated a moment. "No," he said quietly, "I do not deny it."

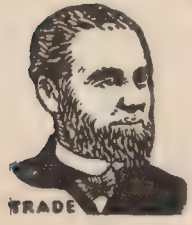
Claire was not sure what was said after that. She was conscious of the girl's voice rising shrilly, of James' voice, cold with anger. When the girl and her father had left, the large solitaire diamond she had worn was lying in James' palm.

He stood looking at the ring a moment; then he put it in his pocket and turned to Claire. "I'm sorry this had to happen, my dear." He took her hands and held them, and she felt comforted and secure. "That engagement was a mistake. I have known it for some time, but I did not know how to get out of it."

He smiled at her, a warm, tender smile. "I am free now. Free to tell you that I love you; that I have loved you from the instant I saw you standing in that doorway with your sweet face framed in a white wedding veil. I knew right then that I had found my bride."

He put his arms about her and drew her close, and she knew at last, without a doubt, that he belonged to *her* world, that he belonged to her.

APPEAL



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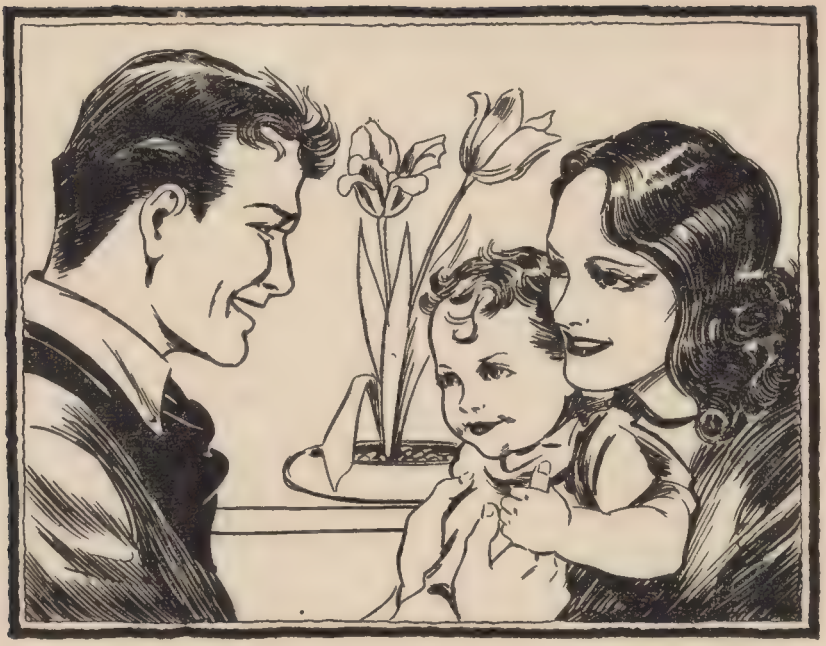

He had as much to learn as the babe in his wife's arms

He Didn't Know Women

By MRS. HARRY PUGH SMITH

CONCLUSION

THEY were married the next day, in the back room of the Methodist parsonage in town with the minister's wife holding Denny. Bill's best friend, Joe Latham, was the other witness.

Mona was wearing the new little black suit Bill had bought her. She was still painfully thin and haggard, but the look in her black eyes was something her husband was never to forget. He had got her a little bunch of white roses to carry, because he thought all brides wanted white roses.

He had explained to the minister that she was a widow.

"The little tike is going to have every break I can give him," he told Mona.

"Just having you for a father is all the break I ask for him," she answered.

During the wedding, she held her head high and nobody could have guessed how close she was to tears. Her hand was very cold when Bill took it, but it was as steady as his own.

"Do you, William," murmured the old minister, "take this woman to wife, to love and cherish and protect, so long as you both shall live?"

A knife went through Bill's heart. Those were the vows he had always expected to make to Eileen.

"I do," he said firmly.

"Do you, Mona, take this man to husband, to love and honor and obey, till death you do part?"

That was what Mona had sworn to do in that mock-marriage with Charles Lacey. Poor kid, thought Bill. She had been in love with Charles. No doubt she still was. She had kept calling for him in the hospital when she believed she was dying.

It occurred to Bill that after the other man he must seem pretty flat. Charles was very blond and extremely charming, and girls had always gone for him in a big way, while Bill himself had never been a ladies' man.

"I do," said Mona.

"I pronounce you man and wife."

Bill drew a long breath. He stooped and kissed Mona very gently. For a moment her hand tightened convulsively in his; then she kissed him back, very shyly.

Bill smiled as he handed the minister a greenback, and hoped his voice sounded the way a happy bridegroom's should. Then he gave Mona his arm and led her outside, with Joe Latham trailing after them.

"Here's where we throw a wedding breakfast!" Bill cried jovially. "Down at the hotel and you're invited, Joe."

He thought the presence of a third party would make it easier. But though he and Joe kept up a conversation, it was a pretty lame one. Joe knew that Bill had never loved any woman except Eileen. He kept watching Mona surreptitiously, as if trying to figure out how she had done it.

She had little to say and she gave nothing away; for that Bill could be grateful. He ordered an extravagant meal, though he had no appetite for it, and Mona merely toyed with her food. It was the little tike who saved the day. He crowed and gurgled and jumped up and down, and when Joe picked him up he acted delighted.

"Isn't he a buster!" exclaimed Bill proudly.

"He sure is," said Joe with a trace of envy in his voice.

After they left the hotel, Bill took Mona over to the general store. He bought the little tike a high chair and a cradle.

"I hate to have you spending so much money on us," Mona faltered.

He grinned at her. "How do you get that way? What does a man make money for, except to spend it on his wife and kid!"

"You're so nice," she stammered, but her eyes said a lot more than that.

"You're easy to be nice to," he told her.

She wasn't beautiful like Eileen, of course, but he liked her dark eyes, and her wistful mouth. She was grateful for the smallest thing he did for her He bought Denny a red balloon and he bought Mona a little necklace of blue stones.

"A wedding present," he said, smiling, "for the sweetest bride I ever had."

He was careful to take her all over town. He introduced her to everybody,

and every time he looked the other person straight in the eye and said firmly, "This is *my wife.*"

He went over to the courthouse and filed the papers necessary to adopt Denny legally, with Mona standing beside him her eyes like stars. He bought her a coke in the drugstore in the afternoon. In a little town the drugstore is where everybody gets together. It was the same thing as giving Mona her début in local society. She played up to his lead beautifully. The women stared at her with wide, curious eyes, but she was gracious, unembarrassed, sweet.

"Good girl," whispered Bill under his breath.

Again the little tike enjoyed a triumph. Everybody made a fuss over him and he beamed at them all.

"Such a little darling!" murmured old Mrs. Whitaker who was the social leader of the town.

"I'm adopting him, you know," said Bill with pride.

The woman glanced at Mona. "His father is dead?"

"Yes," said Bill steadily.

By and by it occurred to him that he had been inventing errands to postpone the moment when he would have to start home. He wondered if Mona suspected how he dreaded going back to the ranch.

"Well," he announced jovially; "we'd better be heading for home."

He loaded Mona and the little tike into the front seat of his battered old flivver and stacked their purchases in the back. All the way out to the ranch he talked. Even to his own ears he sounded like a small boy whistling on his way to the dentist.

For the first time in his life he was not thrilled to come in sight of his own land. He had a sickening feeling that this must be all a dream, only he couldn't seem to wake up. What would Eileen say when she heard about his marriage? Would she mind at all? For a long time he had been convinced in his secret heart that she cared nothing for him.

"If she did, she'd have married me years ago," he thought.

At the ranchhouse he carried the bundles inside, and while Mona got supper he went down to the corral and fed the stock. The windmill was not working very well. He climbed up and oiled it. After a while he realized that he was still killing time.

His jaw tightened. "This is the way you wanted it," he told himself angrily, "and now it's up to you to make a go of it."

Mona had the table set and supper ready when he came in. Denny was sitting in his high chair, pounding on the arm with his chubby fists. Mona glanced quickly at Bill and her eyes were terrified.

"She knows I've got the jitters about the whole business and she's scared to death," he thought with a pang.

He did his best to be gay. He took Denny out of his high chair and jounced him up and down on his foot, a new game which filled the baby with delight.

"He's the cutest little rascal!" exclaimed Bill.

Mona gave Denny his bottle before they sat down to eat. She glanced apprehensively at Bill.

"We've got just what we had last night," she faltered. "I'll have to get a cookbook and learn to make all the things you like."

"Sure," said Bill, "but this tastes plenty good to me."

Denny went to sleep while Mona was washing the dishes. Bill carried him into the other room and put him down

in the new cradle. He got a piece of newspaper to cover the lamp chimney.

When he came back to the kitchen, Mona was in the rocker, sitting stiffly, with her hands locked in her lap. He went over to her and laid his hand gently on her shoulder.

"You mustn't be so worried," he said. "Everything's going to be all right."

She turned her head so that her cheek rested against his hand.

"I shouldn't have let you do it," she faltered. "You won't be happy."

"I'm happy now," he insisted.

She looked up at him and the expression in her eyes brought a lump to his throat.

"I'll do anything I can, anything," she whispered.

He patted her shoulder. "Sure you will," he said, "and I'm going to do my best to make you happy, too. If two people start out the way we have, determined to make their marriage work, it's bound to do so."

He had for just a moment a blinding vision of Eileen's lovely face, of her standing in this very room, her golden head outlined against the red and white curtains at the windows.

"I can't go through with it," he thought. "I can't!"

Then he stooped and gathered Mona into his arms. "Dear," he whispered.

He felt her eyes searching his face. He bent his head and kissed her.

"Darling," he said.

Slowly her arms crept up about his neck. Her lips quivered beneath his. He held her close, so close it made him tremble.

"Don't be afraid, Mona," he said tenderly.

He fell asleep that night, still holding her in his arms. She was his wife for better or worse. He didn't love her, but she was sweet and she belonged to him and everything was going to be all right.

FOR a man who had believed his heart was broken, Bill suffered surprisingly little. He thought of Eileen less and less often as time went on. He was very busy all day with the fall round-up for which he had hired several helpers. And at night he had Mona and the baby to occupy his thoughts.

Bill had no idea how much company a baby could be until he had Denny to romp with every night and morning. "I've heard other folks rave about their kids," he told Mona, "and I thought they were just silly. Now I know better. Only of course their kids can't compare with ours."

Mona's eyes were very soft. "You do feel as if he's yours, don't you?"

"He is mine!" said Bill stoutly.

He whittled a rattler out of a piece of maple; he never went to town without bringing Denny a present. He usually brought Mona something, too, a pair of silk hose or a pot of blooming flowers or a gay clip for her dress or a new house apron.

"You're spoiling me," she said.

"If I am," said Bill, "It's the most fun I ever had in my life."

Once a week he took her in town to the picture show. They had to take the baby along. Usually he slept all through the performance like a little angel, but if he didn't Bill took him outside and walked him up and down till Mona came out.

"I hate for you to miss the picture," she would say. "Let me take him out."

"Be yourself," scolded Bill. "This is your day off."

As a matter of fact he got a kick out of showing Denny off to the men about town. "He's the handsomest kid in the

county," he declared. "I feel like strutting every time anybody looks at him."

Once Denny was ill. He waked them up in the night, struggling for breath. He had a bad case of croup. Of course they thought he was going to choke to death.

Mona was terrified and so was Bill for that matter. There wasn't time to send for a doctor. Later it seemed to Bill that he lived through a thousand years while he was boiling some water and Mona was preparing a vapor of medicated salve. Even after the little tike went back to sleep, apparently as good as new, Bill was frightened.

Mona clung to him, shaking from head to foot. "What would we do if we lost him!" she sobbed. "Oh, Bill what would we do?"

He held her tight, soothed and comforted her. She fell asleep in his arms. This is what makes a marriage, he thought; going through heartbreak together and hanging onto each other.

Bill had stood by Mona then, but the time came when it was her turn to be strong. Bill was in the midst of the fall round-up. He was working day and night, hoping desperately for a good price when he drove his cattle to market.

"Just a fair price," he told Mona the morning he left. "That's all I'm asking. I've worked darned hard, in all kinds of weather. If the market stays up, I'll make some money. Enough to put in electricity and buy a new car and winter coats for you and Denny. But if prices drop, we'll be lucky to eat, the rest of the year."

"They won't drop," she said.

But they did. By the time Bill sold his cattle, the market was lower than it had been in weeks. He didn't actually lose money on the deal; he broke a little better than even.

"But a fellow can't get ahead very fast at that rate," he told Mona gloomily.

"Never mind," she insisted. "You'll have better luck in the spring. Meanwhile we own our own home, we don't owe anybody, and if we economize we can get by fine without going into debt."

Bill thought she took it mighty well. A lot of women would have been sick with disappointment, especially since the very next week the market went up again.

"I guess I'm just dumb," he muttered, thinking of Eileen.

"You are not!" cried Mona indignantly. "You're smart as a whip!"

She actually seemed to think so, too, Bill told himself. For years Eileen had made him feel that he was not smart at all.

Two days later, the market dropped again, much lower than the price at which Bill had sold.

"You see," Mona pointed out triumphantly, "if you'd held onto your cattle, you'd have lost money, instead of breaking even. They say nearly every ranchman around here except you did lose money this fall. That shows how smart you are!"

It was things like that, thought Bill, which put the heart in a man; knowing that your wife believed in you and was backing your play.

He felt humble and grateful, as he put his arm about her. "I was smart one time," he said.

"Yes?"

"The time I married you, Mrs. Thompson."

Her eyes were radiant. "You honestly think so?"

He took her into his arms. He kissed her eyelids, her mouth, the little pulse in her throat.

"Listen," he said, "you suit me right down to the ground."

He supposed afterward that he should have known things were going too smoothly. Life never had been that easy for him. But, as is usually the case, he didn't realize just how happy and contented he was until the bottom dropped out of everything. The blow, when it fell, was twins. Eileen came home and Charles Lacey blew into town, all on the same day.

Bill had brought Mona in that afternoon for a party at Mrs. Whitaker's. It was a social triumph to be asked to the old dowager's house. Bill was pleased to death, but Mona hadn't much wanted to go. "I've never been to a party in my life," she said.

"Well, you're going to some now," he said gruffly, "and you'll be giving them, too."

He thought she looked awfully nice that afternoon. He had wanted her to buy a new dress for the occasion. But she had insisted they had no money to waste on dolling her up, so she pressed her black silk suit and made a new blouse for it and bought a pink rose for her hat and managed somehow to look quite smart.

During the past month, she had picked up a little of the weight she needed to gain. Bill had not realized it until that afternoon, but she was a very pretty girl, now that she had lost her haggard look. Her cheeks were delicately pink, her eyes soft and brilliant. Her mouth was a deep, soft rose and the lips curved upward very sweetly, or so Bill thought.

He wanted to tell her so, but he was too shy. It made him feel self-conscious, raving about people, and yet he did feel like raving about Mona. She had a beautiful body, slender but curved in all the right places.

Mona looked at him anxiously when she was ready. "You won't be ashamed of me in front of those other women?" she asked.

"Ashamed!" cried Bill. "You'll knock their eyes out!"

After he left her at Mrs. Whitaker's, he felt like kicking himself. Too tongue-tied to tell his own wife how pretty she was!

"I guess I'm the world's worst with women," he told himself gloomily.

And then he turned the corner and walked right into young Charles Lacey.

BILL had not even heard that Charles was back from his travels. Yet there he was, lounging gracefully against a post outside the general store, a cigarette dangling from the corner of his mouth, his long, powerful, low-slung roadster parked at the curb.

Bill was astonished at the wave of murderous fury which shot through him. It never had seemed quite real to him that Charles was the other man in Mona's life. He had not expected to want to take him apart on sight, but he did.

Charles grinned at him insolently. "Hello, Thompson," he drawled.

"Hello," snapped Bill and tried to stride past.

But Charles moved deliberately in front of him. "How's tricks?" he asked.

It seemed to Bill that he would have to wipe that sneer off Charles Lacey's face with his fist. Then he thought of Mona, of the pains he had taken to shield her and the little tike from scandal. He drew a long breath, put his clenched hands into his pockets and walked away.

But he couldn't walk away from Charles' sneer. He felt it following him all the way down the street. He

couldn't throw it off while he was transacting some business at the bank. He kept worrying like a dog with a bone. What was Charles doing in town? What was he after? What did he mean to do?

"If he tries to make trouble for Mona, I'll kill him!" Bill told himself savagely.

Late in the afternoon he ran into Joe Latham, who gave him a funny look and began to talk very fast without saying anything and without meeting his eyes. Bill finally laid his hand heavily on his shoulder.

"What's the trouble, Joe?" he demanded.

"N-nothing."

"Go on, spill it," insisted Bill, his face like a thundercloud.

With a good deal of halting and stammering, Joe got the story out. Charles was in town, putting up at the hotel, and he had been circulating pretty freely between the two local bars. He had informed various people that he knew Bill Thompson's wife in New York, and he intimated that Mona had gone for him in a big way.

Bill turned perfectly white. "Do you believe it?" he demanded.

Joe wriggled. "Of course not."

"All right," snapped Bill. "See that you don't."

He walked away, the blood drumming in his neck. As for Mona falling for Charles again, he told himself fiercely that it was a black lie.

Yet he kept remembering how good-looking the other man was and what a gift he had for turning women's heads. He finally located him in a cheap café down the street and beckoned him outside.

Charles looked like an ad for the well-dressed young man about town. He made Bill painfully conscious of his rough khaki trousers and scuffed leather boots and sunburned hands. Charles' hands were soft and white, and his suit was custom-made.

"You want to see me, Thompson?" he inquired with his lazy, insolent smile.

"Yeah," said Bill and his voice was as hoarse as a saw going through a knot hole. "I want to see you about my wife."

"Oh, yes, Mona," murmured Charles.

Just to hear her name on his lips made Bill wild. His face must have mirrored how he felt, for the other man fell back a step and his smile became a little uneasy.

"We both knew," said Bill, hardly moving his lips, "that you are a skunk. If I didn't want to make a lot of talk about my wife and son I'd fix you so you'd never wreck any other woman's life."

"Your son?" sneered the other. "Aren't you a little previous about that?"

I can't take it, thought Bill. Then he remembered the little tike. He mustn't be saddled with a scandal out of his mother's past.

"No," said Bill, "he *is* my son. Don't you ever forget it. He's going to have a square deal, too. That's what I wanted to say to you, Lacey. I don't intend to have Mona all messed up with scandal, or I'd kill you here and now."

Charles was a little green, and there were beads of perspiration on his upper lip. Maybe he looked handsome and charming to women, thought Bill, but to a man he looked like a rat.

"But," he went on, "if you're going to gossip about her, there's going to be a scandal anyhow, so I might as well rid the earth of you as not."

Still Charles said nothing and Bill

took another step toward him. "The only thing that will keep me from wringing your neck is for you to take good care never to let my wife's name cross your lips from now on," he said. "Have I made that plain?"

The other made a desperate effort to recover his poise.

"I didn't mean any harm," he stammered. "I guess I had too much to drink."

"Yeah," growled Bill, "but if it happens again, old Jim Lacey's going to be missing a son."

Charles smiled feebly. "Thompson, I apologize. I had no right to mention Mona's name, and I won't again. She—she's a nice girl. I did give her a dirty deal and I'm sorry. Only—I'd sort of like to see the kid."

Bill's fingers ground into his arm. "You keep away from him! If I ever hear of your so much as trying to speak to Mona, I'll break every bone in your worthless body!"

And then over his shoulder he heard Mona's voice.

THE day had grown quite dark, the early twilight of an overcast November afternoon. Charles had his back to her and she did not recognize him.

"Bill!" she exclaimed. "The party's been over for an hour. I've been looking all over for you. It's time we went home, don't you think?"

She had come right up to them and for the first time saw the other man's face.

"Hello, Mona," said Charles Lacey.

Bill thought she was going to faint, and instinctively he put out his hand to steady her.

"The West agrees with you," Charles went on with an ingratiating smile. "You look like a million dollars."

Bill couldn't stand any more. "Come on, Mona," he said gruffly.

She turned obediently and followed him down the street. She said nothing. She acted like a woman in a daze. They had hired the Widow Dugan to look after Denny while Mona was at the party. When Bill went after him, he crowed and leaped and held out his arms, just as he always did. But nothing else was the same.

Mona hardly opened her mouth all the way out to the ranch. She fixed supper while he was attending to things down at the corral. When he came in, she did not even lift her head. The little tike had had his bottle and been put to bed. Bill made an effort to pretend nothing was wrong. He told a joke or two, but in the face of Mona's blank eyes his wit fell flat.

He tried to mention Charles Lacey. He wanted to tell her that she mustn't worry about his return. Only somehow he had a ghastly feeling that that was just the trouble: Mona had wanted Charles to come.

"She acts as if she couldn't bear the sight of me, now that she's seen him again," thought Bill miserably.

After supper he turned on the radio. Sometimes lately when there was a good orchestra on, he and Mona had danced in the evening. It had been fun. But when he held out his arms tonight, she shook her head.

"I don't feel like dancing," she said.

Her voice was curt and hostile, and she still did not look at him. Bill's face burned. He was beginning to feel like a stranger in his own house. He thought of pulling Mona down on his lap and asking her what the trouble was. Then he thought of Charles and of how she had looked at him, and to save his life he could not put his hands on his wife.

He kept looking forward to the time to go to bed. He thought that with Mona in his arms and the lights out, it would be easier for him to say what must be said. But when he finally suggested turning in, Mona gave him the strangest look.

"I'm awfully tired tonight," she said. "If you don't mind, Denny and I will sleep in the spare room."

Bill felt as if she had slapped his face. After all he had done for her, after the way Charles had treated her and her child, she had only to see him again and she couldn't even bear the idea of sleeping in the same room with Bill.

He thought at first he would have to tell her how he felt. He didn't see how he was going to keep still. His pride was burned up and everything he had ever believed about Mona appeared to have gone up in smoke.

But he couldn't say anything. The wound was too deep. There was nothing in the sound of his voice when he spoke to tell Mona she had cut him to the quick.

"Sure, I don't mind," he said, and shrugged his shoulders. "If that's the way you want it, it tickles me to death."

She walked to the door, but on the threshold she hesitated. Bill felt a feeble hope flutter to his breast. Was she going to relent?

"Good night," she said.

"Good night," snapped Bill.

He stood for a long time after she had gone, and her footsteps still echoed in his ears, walking away from him.

BILL put in the worst night he had ever experienced. He thought he had suffered at Eileen's hands, but he found out that your wife is a lot more to you than a sweetheart can ever be. He suddenly woke up to the fact that he was in love with Mona, in love as he had never been with Eileen.

Mona was real. There was no make-believe in the way he felt about her. She had made him happy, happier than he had ever been in his life. They had had a real home together, he and Mona and the little tike.

"Oh, Lord," groaned Bill, "I'm crazy about her, and now she can't stand the sight of me."

He could hardly wait to see her face the next morning. He kept telling himself he must have imagined that things were as bad as they seemed. But she was still not herself at breakfast, not in the least.

She busied herself with Denny. She looked everywhere except at Bill. When he made a lame attempt at conversation, she answered only in monosyllables. Finally Bill grew angry. What had he ever done except to treat her white?

"Are you going to town again today?" she asked when he got up and grabbed his hat off the nail behind the door.

There was a startled note in her voice and something pleading in her eyes. His pride was up in arms and his eyes were harsh as he looked her up and down.

"Sure I'm going to town," he said. "Why not? There's nothing to hold me around here, is there?"

He wanted her to say she needed him, and she didn't want him to leave. But she merely shrugged her shoulders.

"Don't let me keep you," she said, turning away.

So that's that, thought Bill, feeling savage. He jammed his hat on his head and walked out. He didn't offer to kiss her or the little tike goodby. He kept hoping all the time he was get-

ting the flivver out that she would call him back. Usually she came to the window and waved as he drove away, but she did not appear that morning. He supposed she was glad to get rid of him.

"I wouldn't have believed it possible," thought Bill, fuming all the way into town.

He did not know what to do with himself. He was in no humor to talk to anybody. After he cut several of his friends off with a growl they let him alone. He felt as if he would like to get drunk and shoot up the town. Actually he wanted nothing except to be back at the ranch with Mona.

He didn't know that Eileen had come home until she came out of a store across the street and called to him. Bill merely tipped his hat.

But he was not to escape so easily. Eileen kept calling to him to come over, and when he made no move she crossed to him.

"Hello, darling," she said in her intense voice.

Bill turned scarlet. "Hello, Eileen."

She caught his arm. "I've got to talk to you, Bill! I've got to!" she exclaimed.

He scowled. "There's nothing for you and me to talk about," he said.

He tried to free his arm, but she held onto him. People going by were eying them curiously. Bill was embarrassed to death. Everybody in town knew about him and Eileen.

"Listen," he said, "you'd better move on. You don't want to make a scene here on the street, with everybody looking at us."

"Your wife's made a heroine of herself for life in this town," Joe told Bill, chuckling

"I will, too, make a scene!" cried Eileen passionately. "If you don't want people to see us, walk down the street with me."

"Aw, have a heart," pleaded Bill. "I'm married now. I can't go anywhere with you."

"All I ask," she declared dramatically, "is a few minutes of your time, and I'm going to have it if I have to follow you all over town!"

He knew her well enough to know she meant it. He could have slapped her. He wondered how he could ever have thought her beautiful. Her face was all distorted with temper, and her voice rasped his nerves like a file.

"All right," he growled, "have your say, but I warn you it isn't going to do any good."

Eileen, holding onto his arm feverishly, had a great deal to say. She hadn't finished when they reached her house. She tried to get Bill inside, but there he balked like a mule, so she finished her harangue on the front porch.

She said she realized she had been a fool not to marry him years before. Not until he went out of her life did she realize how much she loved him and how she had always counted on him.

Once to have heard Eileen make any such admissions would have thrilled Bill to death, but not any more.

"I'm sorry," he said, "but it's too late."

"No, no!" she cried violently.

"Yes," snapped Bill.

But Eileen refused to have it that way. She said she knew Bill had mar-

"When Charles came to steal her, she sent him packing—with his rear end full of buckshot"

ried someone else, just to spite her. She understood the girl was pretty in a common way.

"But she played you for a sap, and I let her get away with it! If I'd played my cards right, you never would have married the little tramp!"

"You're talking about my wife, Eileen. Not you nor anybody else can call her that," said Bill furiously.

But she went right on. She said everybody knew that he had never loved any woman except her. She said she wasn't going to stand for having his life and hers wrecked by a little bum.

"You've got to divorce her! You've got to!" she cried in a frenzied voice.

And I thought I was in love with this, Bill muttered to himself.

"Divorce Mona to marry you?" he said. "I'd rather be hung!"

Eileen gaped at him. "You still love me, you know you do!"

"Hell, no," said Bill.

"I don't believe it."

It took him ten minutes of the hardest talking he had ever done before he finally drove it into Eileen's head that he had got completely over her.

"You had your chance and you muffed it, and now I've got a wife who suits me perfectly," he said. "After her, you look like a dish-faced doll."

"Oh!" she gasped. "How dare you!"

"I tried not to insult you, Eileen, but you would have it," said Bill. "You see I'm married to a real woman. She shares my load. More than that, she lightens it. And when I kiss her it's a little bit of heaven. The next time anybody tries to tell you I married Mona to spite you, you can say it's the best bargain I ever made."

He had to pause for breath, and suddenly a new thought struck him.

He eyed Eileen suspiciously. "Were you at Mrs. Whitaker's party yesterday afternoon?" he demanded.

It had occurred to him that might explain the change in Mona. He knew this girl was perfectly capable of telling her a thousand lies.

Eileen looked blank. "No," she said. "Why?"

She was telling the truth. Bill saw that all right, and his heart sank down to his boots.

"Never mind. If you weren't there, it doesn't matter," he said dully.

He turned to go, but again Eileen caught his sleeve. Before he could stop her, she flung her arms about him and kissed him passionately. She was playing her last trump, risking everything on Bill's not being able to resist her. But it didn't work. Instead of thrilling him, she only disgusted him, and his eyes told her so.

Striding off down the street, Bill could think of nothing except getting out of town as quickly as possible. He jumped into his flivver and put his foot down on the gas and proceeded to break the speed limit. He was only three miles from the ranch when Charles Lacey's expensive roadster sprayed him with a cloud of dust, heading toward town.

Bill slammed on the brakes. Had Lacey been to his place? He had no other business, coming from that direction.

He felt tempted to turn around and follow the other man and beat the truth out of him.

Then Bill had a complete revulsion of feeling.

"Mona isn't that kind," he told himself. "I know she isn't."

He clung to his faith in her all the way home. But when he turned in at the corral gates, he saw the marks of Charles' tires in the dust.

NOBODY else in town had a car with tires that big. Staring down at them, Bill felt as if something inside him was breaking. It was his heart, he supposed.

After a while he went into the house, his feet like lead. He felt as if he could never pick them up lightly again. He didn't want to see Mona. He didn't even want to see the baby. Both of them really belonged to Charles Lacey.

She was pressing some of Denny's little clothes. She was wearing one of the little red and white dresses he had bought her. It looked crisp and fresh. Her black hair was all in little curls on the nape of her neck, her cheeks flushed. She looked awfully pretty, but Bill could not look at her without thinking that just a few minutes ago she had been kissing the other man.

"Back so soon?" she stammered. "I —I didn't expect you till dark."

Again Bill felt a murderous rage. Of course she was thinking that if he had come a quarter of an hour earlier he would have caught her with her lover.

"Yes, I'm back sooner than you expected," he said harshly. "I have to do a little work now and then. After all, I have three people and several hundred head of cattle to feed. Otherwise, I wouldn't have been back before dark. This isn't my idea, exactly, of a happy home."

Her face was very red. "No," she said, "this never was your idea of a happy home, was it?"

Bill did not trust himself to speak. He thought if he did he would break down and blubber like a baby. So he grunted something, ignored the little tike who was trying eagerly to attract his attention, and walked out, slamming the kitchen door behind him.

He did have plenty of work to do that afternoon and he did it as if the devil flogged his heels. The physical exertion helped to work off some of the bitterness in his heart.

By supper time, he felt calmer. He had made up his mind to have it out with Mona. He would tell her frankly that he knew Lacey had been to see her, and that he was not going to stand for that sort of business. Not for a minute!

"I'll tell her I love her," he thought. "I'll tell her I'm crazy about her. I'll say I'm ready to do everything in the world for her and the kid, but she has got to let Lacey alone."

It was quite dark when he got off his horse at the corral, but not until he was right at the kitchen door did he realize there was no light in the house. He stood there, unable to believe his eyes. His heart began to pound in great labored thuds.

He never knew just how he got inside. His mind was completely dazed for a few minutes. The bedroom was empty, as empty as the rest of the house. Denny's cradle was standing by the bed, but Denny was gone.

Some time later Bill found himself back in the kitchen. The fire in the range had died down to a bed of coals. That meant Mona had been gone for at least an hour. She must have left before it began to get dark. Her apron was still hanging on a nail by the sink.

Bill went over and laid his cheek against the small red and white apron. He couldn't seem to think coherently. Everything buzzed round and round in his head. Mona had left him! She had gone away and taken the little tike with her.

She had gone with Charles Lacey. He had no doubt of that.

Bill thought he had known trouble, but this was something he could not

take. It cut the very ground from under his feet. It made him wish he could die, so that he would not suffer any more. He felt he could never lift his head again.

He dragged himself over to the kitchen table and lighted the lamp. His mind still refused to work right. He felt punch-drunk, as if he had taken a blow beneath the belt. Only one thought stood out in the jumble: Mona had run away with Charles Lacey and taken the little tike with her. She was gone. She was worse than dead to him.

He must have been working at the back of the place when Charles drove up the second time. And a good thing, too, thought Bill, the blood in his temples throbbing.

He glanced at his shotgun, hanging by the pantry door. He had never expected to use that gun on a human being, but he would have, had he caught Charles Lacey in the act of stealing his wife. Flesh and blood could stand so much and no more.

"I'd have shot him down at her feet, like the dog he is," he said aloud, his fists clenching.

Something about the gun worried him. It was not hanging right, the way he was always careful to hang it, so that there would be no danger of its falling and discharging accidentally.

Bill could not understand it. Mona never touched the gun. She was so afraid of it she never even dusted it. But somebody had handled the thing since he last hung it back in position.

He went over to the gun and lifted it down. He frowned. The weapon had not only been handled; it had been fired. He glanced down the barrel. It was fouled, and the gunpowder smell was strong.

His brow wrinkled. Mona had used the gun. There was no other explanation. She must have fired it before he came home that morning. But why had she said nothing about it? And what could she have shot at?

He was positive that only extreme peril to herself or Denny would have made her touch the gun. But if something had terrified her that much, why hadn't she told him?

Then suddenly he had an idea. His face was grim when he went to the telephone.

He called Joe Latham. Joe was a veterinary and a good one. He was also a perennial bachelor, and he spent his spare time hanging around the various bars and eating places in town. Nothing ever went on that Joe did not know about.

He began to laugh the minute he heard Bill's voice. He laughed so hard, he couldn't even talk for a minute.

"Sure I know where Charles Lacey is," he said at last, between gurgles. "He's at home, nursing his wounds. I'll lay you a little bet it will be a year of Sundays before he shows in these parts again."

"His wounds?" repeated Bill blankly.

"Sure, didn't your wife tell you?"

"Suppose *you* tell me."

Joe asked nothing better. He said Charles had bragged around town that morning that he was going out to Bill's place and take his wife away with him.

He breezed off in his fine car. He was gone quite a while. When he came back, he was in agony. They had to help him into the doctor's office; somebody had to drive him home to his dad's ranch. It seemed that Charles was unable to sit down comfortably.

Joe guffawed. "In fact it's going to be quite a while before he'll sit down with any ease," he chortled.

"But what happened to him!" cried Bill.

Again Joe was overcome with laughter. He said everybody in town was sniggering about it. Charles Lacey would never live it down.

"Yes, sir," chuckled Joe, "that little wife of yours has spiked Lacey's guns for life."

"But what did she do?" asked Bill desperately.

"She filled his rear end full of buckshot."

Joe was off again. He laughed until he said he felt as weak as a cat.

Even Bill was grinning. There was something excruciatingly funny about a man bragging that he was going to run off with another man's wife, and then having her fill the seat of his pants full of buckshot. Bill had never thought he would feel like laughing again.

"Everybody in town's tickled to death about it," Joe explained. "Your wife's made a heroine of herself for life."

Slowly Bill replaced the receiver. Gradually the laughter died out of his eyes. He stared around the kitchen. It was still empty, empty of everything that mattered to him. Mona had not run away with Charles, but she was gone just the same.

NIGHT had fallen when Bill got into his flivver. He drove as slowly as possible, scanning both sides of the road as he went. He was scared to death he would miss Mona in the dark. She had over an hour's start on him, but she was walking and carrying the little tike.

Bill's forehead was dewed with perspiration. She might be anywhere. He didn't even know she had gone toward town. He wasn't sure of anything, except that he had to find her.

She had no money with her. He had looked to see. The housekeeping money was right where she always kept it, in a milk bottle over the sink. But, as she had said, people were usually good about giving a lift to a woman with a baby in her arms.

Bill's breath came with labor through his lungs. For all he knew she might be well away by now, riding off from him through the night. He might never find her again.

Once more it was the little tike who saved the day. If Denny had not cried out, Bill would have gone right on past the dark clump of trees and never seen them. He backed the flivver up so that the headlights shone into the concealing shadows and got out. He started toward her and Mona burst into tears and ran into his arms.

"Oh, Bill! Bill!" she sobbed, clinging to him convulsively.

No, he thought, I never will understand women. For no reason at all that he knew of, Mona had turned against him. She had left him. Yet here she was, clinging to him as if she never meant to let him go; rubbing her cheek against his shoulder like a lost child, looking up at him with wet shining eyes, as if she adored him.

Bill wasted no time in words. He just held his wife tight, and smoothed back her tumbled hair and kissed her. Her lips were like flame against his. Bill knew nothing about women, but he did not see how any woman could kiss a man like that unless she loved him, a heck of a lot.

"We'd better be getting home," he said huskily. "The little tike will be wanting his bottle."

Mona's arms tightened about him. "You—you're sure you want to take us back with you, Bill? Dead sure?"

Her voice quavered and her eyes were desperately urgent as if every-

thing on earth hung upon his reply. Bill patted her shoulder. He took up the little tike who was squalling lustily in his basket on the ground.

"Listen," said Bill, "there are a lot of things I don't know about and never will, but if I ever was sure of anything it's that I want my wife and child where they belong."

"Oh, Bill!" whispered Mona, her face radiant.

Her eyes, when they walked into the ranchhouse, made his own mist over. If ever a woman looked as if she had walked back into heaven it was Mona. All the while she was fixing supper, she kept touching the dishes, the pots and pans, caressingly.

Bill shook his head. She loved their home; she had hated leaving it. Nevertheless she had. He gave it up. She loved him; this time he could not be mistaken. Yet in spite of all that, she had run away.

The little tike went to sleep over his bottle while they were having supper. Bill carried him into the other room and laid him on the bed. He stood looking down at him, his heart full of pride. He was such a swell kid! Bill stooped and gently kissed the little question mark of a curl which stood up on the baby's forehead.

"The only thing you need, old man, to make you perfect," he whispered, "is a couple of little brothers and sisters to keep you company."

When he came back into the kitchen, Mona was just finishing up the dishes. She looked at him, with that new shyness in her eyes, and quickly looked away. Bill went over to her and gently took the dish towel out of her hands.

"Now," he said, "suppose you tell me what this was all about."

She hid her face against his chest. Her voice was so low and shaken that Bill had to bend his head to hear, but she finally told him the whole story. She had tried so hard to be a good wife and almost at once she had fallen in love with him. He was so good and so kind and so strong, such a wonderful person.

"Who—me?" cried Bill. "You must be thinking of a couple of other people."

"You're the most wonderful person in the world," said Mona, his wife.

She said that after a while she thought Bill was falling in love with her. She was almost afraid to believe it, but she did and was wildly happy. Then she went to Mrs. Whitaker's party and heard about Eileen Sawyer. She had come back to town, and everybody was buzzing about what Bill would do.

"They said you'd been in love with her for years," faltered Mona. "They said everyone was astonished when you married me."

"Astonished because I used my head for once!" growled Bill.

Nobody knew how he came to break up with Eileen, but Mona figured it out. "She quit you because you took me and Denny in, didn't she?" she asked.

Bill wriggled. "More or less."

Mona said it nearly broke her heart when she learned that she had cost Bill the woman he loved.

"I kept thinking that Denny and I were just millstones about your neck," she said. "That's why I slept in the spare room last night. I couldn't bear it, thinking that every time you kissed me you wished it could be Eileen."

"Be yourself," growled Bill. "You're my wife and I'm crazy about you. Eileen is the last woman on earth I'd want to kiss."

"But you did kiss her, this morning

when you were in town!" cried Mona in a distracted voice.

BILL simply stared at her. She went on brokenly to explain that when he went to town so unexpectedly, she supposed he was going to see Eileen.

"But you were so cross with me," she faltered. "You didn't kiss me goodby. You didn't even kiss Denny goodby. I almost broke down at the last. I thought I couldn't stand it. It seemed to me I'd have to call you back, but I hadn't any right, because you loved her first."

She said that all morning she kept telling herself maybe she was wrong. Bill couldn't have gone to Eileen, even if he did still love her, because he was married to Mona.

"I tried so hard to believe you cared for me, instead of her," she whispered. "Then you came home and you *had* been with her. You had kissed her. I knew then you did love her, and so there was nothing for me to do but get out of the way."

Bill drew a long breath. "I did see Eileen, Mona, because I couldn't get out of it. She grabbed me right on Main Street and refused to turn me loose. She disgusted me so, I never want to set eyes on her again!"

"Bill!"

"Maybe I wasn't in love with you when I married you," he said, "but it's a cinch you've cured me of that dame."

Her eyes shone. "Honestly, Bill?"

"I finally convinced Eileen of it," he said grimly. "I didn't kiss her, Mona. She kissed me, and I could have wrung her neck. But darned if I know how you found out."

Mona smiled tremulously. "There was the print of her lipstick on your cheek when you got home," she said. "Darling, it's still there."

Bill glanced hastily into the glass beside the sink. Sure enough, on one of his tanned cheeks there was a scarlet smear. He said several very vigorous words.

Mona laughed weakly. "That's why I went away. I thought you'd been with her. I thought that was why you said this wasn't your idea of a happy home."

Bill's arms tightened about her. "Listen," he said, "so far as I'm concerned, this house is heaven. That is, when you and the little tike are in it."

She looked up at him, her lips quivering. "You—like us?"

"If I liked you any more, I'd bust."

Mona laid her lips against his hand. "You never have said it," she whispered.

"Said what?" asked Bill blankly.

"That you love me."

He shook his head. "I don't get women. I've shown you every way I can. I'm not very good at putting things into words, but you ought to know by now."

"Know what?" she whispered.

"Know I love you. Good Lord, I'm nuts about you."

She crept into his arms. "Go on, Bill. Go on."

He drew a long breath. It was still difficult for him to express his feelings, but he was going to learn, if it killed him.

"Listen," said Bill. "I love every hair on your head. I love the way your eyes shine. I love the little dimple by your mouth. I love the way you walk and talk, everything you do and say. All I want is to spend the rest of my life loving you."

"Oh, Bill!" cried Mona in a lilting voice.

It was worth it, he thought, making her that happy. He wouldn't forget

again that women like to be told.

Then suddenly he caught sight of the shotgun on the wall. It seemed incredible that until that moment he had not thought of Charles Lacey and apparently Mona hadn't, either.

Again Bill reflected ruefully that what he did not know about women would fill an encyclopedia. "About Lacey," he said awkwardly, "he isn't seriously hurt. His—er—wounds are painful, but he'll be all right in a week or so."

"Will he?" murmured Mona. "That's too bad."

Bill gave a shout of laughter. "You sure fixed that bird for life. He'll never bother us again."

"He had the nerve to come out here this morning. He started right in making love to me. As if I could stand the sight of him, after you!"

She wrinkled her nose with distaste. "I knew I'd die if he put his hands on me. Finally when he wouldn't go, I ordered him out. He kept coming toward me, so I picked up the gun and pointed it at him. He turned around then to run, but it was too late. It just seemed to go off by itself."

Bill marveled at her matter-of-fact tone. She did not seem in the least upset by her action. He had always heard that women were the practical sex, but he had never believed it until then. He held Mona tighter and bending his head began to kiss her, over and over.

"Thank Heaven, my darling," he murmured, "you've rid us of him forever."

Mona snuggled closer against him, her lips against his cheek. "Bill, darling, I've never asked anything of you for myself. Promise me something?"

"Of course, sweetheart."

"Never, never let me go," she said passionately, "as long as we both shall live."

Bill's voice was muffled as he answered, "Never through all eternity, my sweet."

THE END

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The Blond Gorilla

By MARCIA RAY

How can you discourage a masher if he won't mash?

HANNA McINTOSH tapped the rubber end of her pencil against her teeth. It was a silly idea anyway, keeping a diary. Unless of course you had something terribly important to remember. She glanced over the few entries she had made since spring.

"March 25. John Fisher asked me to marry him. I said I would. He is going on an expedition to Africa to write a book, and I am going along to do the animal illustrations. It's the chance of a lifetime. John says it will be a very sensible arrangement. And that's okay by me. I don't want love."

The next few months were blank. She didn't need to put it down in black and white to remember that John had called religiously every Wednesday and Sunday evening at exactly seven P.M. and left, after an evening devoted to Africa, it's needs and opportunities, at exactly ten-thirty. Once in a while he kissed her. Maybe she should have noted those evenings, they were so unusual. John wasn't romantic, Hanna sighed a little, but he was what she wanted.

And then the diary took up again:

"June 18. Sketched animals at the zoo. John says it's good practice. A big blond athlete followed me around whistling all day. Old numbers I used to play in Lane's Department Store when I was working my way through art school. Just a waste of time for him. I'm a sensible engaged woman.

"June 19. He was at it again. That Blond Gorilla. If this keeps up, I'll tell John.

"June 21. No, I won't tell John. He'd think I'd suddenly gone feminine. Imagining things. Maybe I'm flattering myself that the Gorilla wants to pick me up. Maybe he just likes the zoo.

"June 24. I hoped he'd forget me over the week-end. But no such luck. He's back at the old stand today with 'You ought to be in pictures!' "

Hanna wet the tip of her pencil with her tongue, and her hand was steady as she wrote in determined black letters:

"June 25. I will handle this matter myself. I will not be disturbed at my work. I will not be picked up. You just wait till tomorrow, Mr. Smarty!"

She closed the diary with a snap, and slipped it into the lowest desk drawer under a pile of old magazines, where she wouldn't ever have to think about it again.

But a little feeling of excitement stayed with her all that evening, while John read aloud two chapters from a Boy Scout Manual, and one chapter in "Darkest Africa." Her mind was busy with the details of her plot, and it didn't seem to matter that John called her inattentive.

The morning was hot with that heavy muggy heat which does so little to improve dispositions. Hanna set her full soft lips in a determined line as she yanked her car into the narrow parking space. She hadn't guessed wrong. The Blond Gorilla was there again. Actually waiting in a disreputable car parked almost next to hers.

She pushed back the mop of dark curls that clustered, heat-wet, to her forehead. She had reached automatically for her compact when she felt amused eyes upon her. Hastily she slipped the little enameled trinket back into her purse. He might, just might, think she was primping for him, the blustering, conceited old—whistler!

Hanna smiled grimly. This would be the last time he'd wait for her.

Briskly she got out of the car. She lifted the collapsible baby buggy from the back seat, and snapped it into place. It didn't work as easily as the janitor's wife had said it should. She grew hotter, fastening the clamps. Let him look! He'd see something this day to make those big blue eyes of his bug right out of his head.

The carriage in place, Hanna reached again into the back seat. Gingerly she removed from their tiny baskets, two wriggling mites of humanity, their baby faces screwed against the sun. She laid them carefully, side by side, in the canvas carriage.

That would fix him! A sly little chuckle caught the corner of her lips, crinkled her dark lashed eyes. Nothing should discourage a man like some other man's twins—unless, of course, it was quadruplets.

HANNA wheeled the carriage through the zoo entrance, past the monkeys and the snakes, the swine and the wild deer. In front of the giraffe yard, she stopped. She adjusted the hood so that the sun would not shine in too delicate eyes, before she took the pad and the sketching pencils from her portfolio.

Skillfully she began to fill in the outlines of Mama Giraffe on her pad. The tall sinuous neck, the thin pipestem legs, bent now in the difficult feat of adjusting that neck to crop a mouthful of grass.

Mama Giraffe was being difficult today. Hanna tried first one pencil then another. She ripped sheet after sheet from her pad. Funny how her ears strained for the whistle she did not hear.

What was the matter with her anyway? Did she *want* him to follow her?

She threw down her pencil at last. Maybe she'd better go over by the bear cages. She'd been there yesterday. You certainly couldn't discourage a masher. If he wasn't round to be discouraged. She got up slowly and wheeled her sleeping charges over toward the bears.

Hanna settled herself again. Bears seemed easier to draw than giraffes today. She worked steadily for fifteen minutes. But something about the bear before her reminded Hanna of the young man. Of course the man was blond, and the bear was a distinct brunette. But there was the same huskiness of build, a lumbering sort of grace, a gentleness of hidden strength. Besides, the bear seemed to be laughing at her today.

She got up and began to wheel the babies toward the camels. She tried to keep her thoughts on John, to tell herself how truly fortunate she was to find him. Only she wished—Hanna shrugged vaguely as she stepped on the footbridge, and stopped to sigh at the swans floating aimlessly in the stream below. She didn't know what she wished.

She looked up suddenly at the strains of "Rock-a-by-Baby," shook herself to quick attention. Furiously she began to push the buggy with its precious burdens with all her might. But there was a crack in the rough boards of the bridge, and the flimsy carriage wheel caught in it. Hanna pushed harder, her eyes straight ahead. She would not look around.

There was a ripping sound, a sudden letting down of the buggy handle from her fingers. A wheel skated merrily across the bridge and into the water. Hanna said, "Darn!" angrily eight times, and was thankful John wasn't there to hear her. He would expect her to be calm and cool in emergency.

Two thin mews from the buggy. The twins were objecting, too, in their peculiar language. The whistling was louder now. Hanna tried to wheel the broken carriage, but it limped along, sagging, while the babies wailed fretfully.

The husky figure was moving closer. Of a sudden it passed, then stopped before her. Hanna stared stonily ahead. She'd cut her tongue out before she'd speak.

"Pardon me, madam, but you seem to have had an accident. May I be of assistance?"

The stranger was looking straight at the twins, not at the empty axle. Hanna blushed furiously.

"I can manage, thank you." She tried to keep her voice calm.

"But what are you going to do when the other wheel drops off? It's getting looser every minute. See it wobble?"

Hanna hadn't thought of that possibility. You couldn't wheel a baby carriage on two wheels. Not and be dignified.

"You've no idea how good I am with children," the young man persisted. "If it's an introduction you

need, we might ask that giraffe back yonder. He's a good friend of mine. He'd tell you my name is Carter Drake, and *my* past is above reproach."

And then, as if that settled it, Carter Drake took charge. "Now if you will be so good as to carry these infants, I'll take the carriage. Under my arm, like this. Now your portfolio."

In a twinkling it was done. The two wriggling babies, howling in earnest by this time, were in Hanna's arms. The carriage, neatly folded, was under Carter's arm.

"They're crying," Hanna said inanely, angry the minute afterward for speaking.

"Perhaps they're hungry," suggested Carter. "We might give them a little ice cream."

Hanna shook her head. "They never eat between meals," she said primly.

"Do they crave fun? A pony ride?"

She shot him a withering glance. "They're only six weeks old."

"Perhaps they'd like to go back and see the giraffe."

"I must take them home immediately."

"As you say, Miss—"

"McIntosh," she supplied, taken unawares.

The man's eyebrows went up quizzically. "And the twins, Miss McIntosh?"

"Oh, they're not—" Hanna caught herself in time. "McIntosh is my professional name," she finished coldly.

"I see." Carter looked altogether too knowing.

Hanna vowed she wouldn't open her mouth again. And she'd never, never come back to the zoo no matter what John said. Even if it killed her. Even if it meant not going to Africa.

Suddenly the thought of Africa didn't seem quite so appealing, anyway. It was such a long way off.

At last she was in the car. The babies, still squalling, were intact in their little baskets. The broken buggy was tucked away on the seat.

"You can manage now?" Carter smiled disarmingly.

"Thank you so much," Hanna said stiffly. It was a toothpaste grin she told herself. "I really could have managed just as well alone."

He smiled again, wider this time. "Your most ungrateful words are music to my ears."

She swung the car sharply, but her ears burned as she heard the low whistle following her: "I wouldn't be lonely, I wouldn't be blue, if I had a girl like you." It was the most unpleasant tune she had ever heard. She hadn't liked it even when it first came out, ages ago.

SHE returned the borrowed babies, still fretful, to the janitor's wife.

"They had a nice outing," she explained wearily, "but they are hungry or something. They seem to be crying."

The janitor's wife snatched up her infants. "It was a big mistake, miss! No matter how much you paid me, I'd never let you take my babies out again. They're better off at home."

Hanna thought so, too. But that woman ought to be grateful that her babies had a chance to see the zoo, instead of acting so disagreeable about the broken buggy wheel.

The twins disposed of, Hanna ran upstairs to her own little studio-sitting room, and cried for twenty minutes.

She was still sniffing softly when the telephone rang. She looked at the clock. Twenty past one. It would be John, of course. He always called her just after he got back from lunch. He was late today.

His voice came, cool and calm, yet Hanna could detect an undercurrent of excitement.

"Busy tonight?" he began. He knew she was never too busy for him. Without waiting for her to speak, he hurried on. "Mrs. Albertson is giving a small dinner and a reception afterward for all the people we're considering for the trip. She wants me there, naturally, and you, of course. I'll expect you about ten."

"Isn't that rather late for dinner?" she asked.

"Pardon me, madam, but you seem to have had an accident." The brute was looking straight at the twins, not at the broken axle

"Well, you see—er—you're invited only to the reception. I shall be waiting for you there."

Hanna wanted to refuse. She'd have to take a taxi and make an entrance by herself. Still, she'd have to meet Mrs. Albertson some day, since she was getting up the expedition. "Just to give her no-account nephew an excuse to take moving pictures," John had explained.

"Yes, John, I'll be there," she said dutifully.

"Shall I wear my ring?" she added. She always left it to him whether or not their engagement should be known.

She felt John hesitate; then he said, "I think not, Hanna. I've been talking with Mrs. Albertson, and until everything is arranged I—er—think not."

"I get it." Hanna's voice was grim. "You're just waiting for the old lady to pass her okay."

"Hanna!" John sounded shocked. No wonder, she thought bitterly. She'd never spoken to him like that before.

She shook the telephone, after she hung up, until the receiver fell off again. Did the man think she wasn't human? Just because it was such a nice sensible arrangement for them to be married before they started off to the jungle, did he have to act so—stodgy? Even if he was going to get his old book illustrated free, couldn't he work up just a little sentiment?

After all, she wasn't exactly a blot on the landscape! She didn't have to marry John unless she wanted to. It was just that, well, she wasn't in love with anyone.

She shook her head to shut out two bright blue eyes. This expedition was her opportunity to see the world, to make her reputation as an artist. Who knew? She might even fall in love with John.

But Hanna was restless as she got out her evening gown. Something, some spice of the African adventure was gone. True, her gown of rough crepe, to stand the ravages of shipboard packing, was cut like a famous movie star's. It was a soft deep shade of green, with no back and very little front. But she doubted if John would approve.

She spent all afternoon arranging her hair in tiny ringlets on her forehead, and putting dark red polish on her nails, then wiping it carefully off.

But at ten that night, when she stepped from the taxi into the brilliantly lighted hall of Mrs. Albertson's brownstone front, she was wearing the red polish, and her gentle little mouth was bee-stung with lipstick. She looked altogether different from the simple two-ninety-eight wash dress Hanna that John had known. She'd make him notice her somehow, if only to disapprove.

Why was it, she wondered, that the people who ought to pay attention to you, like John, never did? And the people who ought not to know you even existed, like that Blond Gorilla, annoyed you eternally?

John hardly recognized her. "Why, Hanna, my dear! I'm afraid you're a trifle extreme. I should have warned you. I'm afraid Mrs. Albertson won't care for your—er—costume."

Hanna shrugged, and smiled carelessly up into his serious face. "But you like it, don't you, dear?"

His face didn't light up the way it should. He looked cross and forbidding. But at least he was paying her some attention.

Mrs. Albertson was a plump middle-aged person in glittering black jet. There were diamonds crawling all over her plump hands, up her arms, even

into the piled up mass of too golden hair.

"Oh, yes, Miss McIntosh," she greeted Hanna vaguely. Then she turned her attention to John, who beamed and fidgeted under the blaze of diamonds.

Hanna sought in vain for a familiar face among the guests. It was awkward, standing there, ignored by your own fiancé. Why, John wasn't even being civil! Turning his back on her, to bill and coo with a woman old enough to be his grandmother.

And then a new voice cut across the conversation. "Well, well, the little lady of the twins."

HANNA hadn't had an inkling before of what it meant to be embarrassed. "How do you do?" She nodded frigidly, hating the challenge in those deep blue eyes. Eyes that did not change, whether their owner wore a blue shirt or a dark tuxedo.

She could feel John's gaze upon her. Of course he couldn't have helped hearing that booming greeting. Everybody in the room must have heard.

"And how are they this evening?" the voice went on smoothly. "Such lovely children. Let me congratulate the fortunate father." And he extended his hand toward John.

John's face was purple with confusion. Hanna looked at him, wanting for one hysterical minute to burst into laughter.

"Sorry." John looked as if he had a ramrod in his back. "This is the first I've heard of twins."

Carter Drake struggled to look abashed. "Oh, pardon. I'm the one who is sorry. I see I should never have mentioned them. But such adorable children. Is your—er—husband here tonight, Miss McIntosh?"

"Miss McIntosh is not married." John's voice was tight with rage.

"Oh, I say, I *am* sorry! I've put my foot in it this time. Can I take you somewhere, Miss McIntosh?"

Hanna could not speak. She glanced at Mrs. Albertson's cold eyes, into John's furious ones. It was easier to go than stay. No amount of explaining would do the least bit of good.

As she turned away, she heard the older woman's voice, a shade too loud. "I'm afraid, dear John, that girl wouldn't do at all. She's not the type for expeditions."

And John's murmured apology. "But I assure you, Lulu, I've been deceived in her."

Carter led Hanna over to a sofa in an uncrowded little anteroom. She let him pull her down beside him. Then suddenly her anger blazed.

"Now see what you've done! You've cost me a husband and a trip to Africa and a career and everything I want in the world. And why? Just because you wanted to make me look silly. I know your kind, always amusing yourself at other people's expense. Some of us have to earn our bread and butter, but you wouldn't understand. Featherweight!"

"Well, of course"—Carter acted injured, too—"I didn't know they weren't your children. You don't think I'd do a thing like this on purpose, do you?"

"I certainly do!" Hanna gave a disgusted groan. "You just want to torment me. You knew they weren't my children."

"But they were dear little things." Carter nodded reminiscently.

"They were not! They were horrid brats." Hanna was at the point now where she didn't care what she said. Only she couldn't say it fast enough.

"Now is that any way for a well brought up American girl to talk about anyone's children?"

Suddenly Hanna laughed. A faint laugh, to be sure, but a tinkle of amusement all the same. It was as if in her heart the tide had changed. Quarreling couldn't do her any good. She might as well see the funny side.

There's no use talking to you." She shook her head sadly. "You just don't make sense. Going to Africa was my big chance to do something real with my animal drawings, and you've put a crimp in that. But you should worry. Excuse me, I'm going home."

"I'll go with you." Carter rose.

"Please don't! I couldn't stand you another second."

The man laughed. "I knew it would be like this, once we got to know each other. Hurry and get your coat."

It was a long maroon town car which waited for them at the curb. Hanna sat huddled in one corner.

"Do you really want so much to go to Africa?" he asked curiously.

"Of course I do. I'd do practically anything to go."

"Anything?" His voice held a new note, mocking, derisive.

Hanna held her breath. Watch him! she cautioned herself. He's going to trap you somehow. Don't answer.

"Would you marry a man you didn't love, just to be taken along?"

"I was going to." Hanna forgot she was not to answer.

"All right, then. You'll never know the horrible fate I've saved you from. Would you marry a man you did love —to go to Africa with him?"

"No," said Hanna positively, a strange tremor setting up in her throat.

"Couldn't you leave the twins?"

"Oh, please, won't you keep still?" But she might as well be talking to the wind. "I'm going to marry a girl who doesn't love me, just to take her to Africa," he announced.

"I'm sure that will be very nice."

"I'm sure it won't. Why don't you save me from the fate I've rescued you from? After all, it must be terrible to live for the rest of your life with somebody you just can't bear the sight of."

"Who says I can't bear the sight of you?"

Now he had it! Now the trap had sprung. Darn her quick old tongue. Hanna leaned sharply forward and rapped against the glass. "I'll get out here," she said quickly to the chauffeur.

Carter pulled her back on the seat beside him. "Go on George. The young lady made a mistake. And you, Miss McIntosh, whom do you mean by that last statement exactly?"

"By what?" Hanna tried to look blank, her heart beating madly.

"You know by what. Listen to me for once, and don't interrupt. You think, just because you're ambitious, that you have to go to Africa to draw lions and tigers and giraffes to make a bunch of useless fame for yourself. You're crazy. You can stay right here in New York and draw more animals in the zoo than you'll ever see in Africa. You can even take the kids out with you while you draw, and save nursemaid's expenses."

"Will you stop talking about babies?" Hanna struggled to escape the firm arm about her shoulders.

"And will you stop interrupting? You will have babies. I can tell by looking at you. You're that kind of girl. You belong in a nice little white house with lots of flowers growing round it, with white iron furniture on the lawn and pink paper in the bedroom. You don't want to go to Africa.

You'll get all sunburned, and your hair will fall out, and you'll be miles from a dentist. You'll get malaria and, gosh, it will be just awful. I know."

"That's right. Console me with the disadvantages." She sank back weakly against his arm. "I'm not going anyway now."

"Yes, you are, too. You said you wanted to go to Africa, and you're going. Understand?"

"How?" Either Carter was crazy or she was.

"On our honeymoon, idiot. What do you think I'm talking about?"

"I'm sure I wouldn't know." She began to laugh wildly.

"Listen, Hanna, I've been talking to you for a week, now. Whistling my heart out. Don't you remember back in Lane's Department Store, when you were pounding the piano on Saturday afternoons, a handsome blond boy used to come in at quarter to four and stay till closing time? Where do you think I got all those moth-eaten tunes anyhow? I went back one day and you'd left the store. I never saw you again till I ran into you at the zoo."

"Just who are you anyway?" Her voice quavered a little.

"Snoopy, aren't you? Here I am, proposing to you, and you ask who am I! But I suppose you're entitled to know. Mr. Lane of the department store was my uncle. Mrs. Albertson was his wife. Only he died and she married again. Does that make sense?"

"Mrs. Albertson's no-account nephew, going along to take pictures." Hanna tried to make a joke of it, though the pulse jumping in her throat interfered seriously with her voice.

"Exactly. Only Mrs. Albertson isn't financing the expedition. I am. And she isn't going to Africa. She enjoys feeling important, so she's been getting the supplies and making up the party for me. I've been much too busy working on a reluctant little prospect up at the zoo, for routine work. And I don't think we'll take John, either. I don't think he's the type for expeditions." His voice suddenly sobered. "Don't you know, darling, that I'm in love with you? Seriously and forever?"

"But I don't want love," Hanna wailed. Even in her own ears the words did not sound convincing.

"You'll take what you get and like it, young lady." His laugh was low and a little unsteady, as his arm about her tightened. "Love is too important to miss. Don't you think we could be happy together?"

But he kissed her, and it wasn't till ten minutes later that Hanna found herself whispering, "Yes, oh, yes!"

By FRANCES LAKE

Wolf! Wolf!

Love wore a false face so often she dared not open her heart to any knock

AND so I must ask you to release my brother from this absurd engagement." As he spoke, Michael Court's dark, penetrating gaze faltered and fell beneath the cold contempt in Cynthia's brown eyes.

Fingers gripped tensely on the stout iron pickets of the fence surrounding her wolf kennels, she stood, blond head high, staring dazedly at the animals at feed. Fat, fluffy gray-white cubs lunging awkwardly, half fearfully, to grasp a morsel of raw meat from the snarling jaws of their elders. A side-swipe from a lean-flanked mother wolf, sending them yelping to safety.

Strange, thought Cynthia, that they could go back to savagery at feeding time, when at other times they were as tame as dogs. So tame that the Kilburn Kennels were becoming known as far away as Hollywood, and actors and actresses came to buy them for pets.

"If you wish to talk with Ron before he leaves," suggested Michael stiffly, "I'll see that he comes tonight. He asked me to explain, however. It hasn't been a pleasant task."

Cynthia swung around to face him: her slim rounded figure, clad in ta-

"How much are you willing to pay for my night of love—with your wife? It ought to be worth about fifty thousand, I should say"

Without haste Michael pulled the other man toward him. "It isn't worth a dime," he said, "but the truth is"

suède, jodhpurs and blue woolen pullover, stiffened defiantly. But the man's dark eyes remained fixed upon the rolling Maryland hills in the distance, now a blaze of autumnal glory in the September sunset.

He could not face her, she thought contemptuously, staring at his grim, bronzed profile. This Michael Court, lord and master of that great white mansion on the hill.

Michael Court, stepbrother to Ronny, and guardian of his destiny until he was twenty-five. Poor Ronny,

chained for four more years under the yoke of that despotic, cruel man.

Ronny, so blithely gay, so madly in love with her. Ronny, with whom she was so terribly in love.

Cynthia said in slow mockery, "You'll see that he comes tonight? How terribly kind of you, Mr. Court. What gentle ways you must have learned in Africa. Only Ronny would be here now, if you weren't keeping him away by threats or force."

She flung back her shoulders and faced him defiantly. "You say it's because of Ronny's musical career that we mustn't marry. That's not true, is it? It's because I'm Cynthia Kilburn, alone and unimportant. Because I breed wolves and sell them for my living!"

Her voice broke. She flung blindly down the wooded path leading to her house at the foot of the low hill.

Halfway, Michael's hands caught her arms, swung her around to him. "I don't know how to convince you," he said fiercely, "that what you say is nonsense. I'd be proud to marry you myself, if you—if we loved each other. I only want to save you from unhappiness."

Cynthia struggled to free herself from his grip. Her heart shied backward in rapid canters of fear as she felt a surge of hidden forces flowing from his powerful body into hers.

He went on, low, "Love, I'm sorry to admit, is only a habit with Ron. During college, there were dozens of—escapades, until he finally was expelled. Since then I've spent a small fortune on his musical career, because he has it in him to become a great pianist."

He smiled grimly. "But all I've won is his defiance. When I left for Africa last February, he promised he would go immediately to New York to study under Andre Corelli. He's spent these seven months becoming engaged to another girl. You know, of course, he was engaged to Lois Montagna before you?"

Cynthia caught her breath sharply. She didn't know! It was a lie, because surely she would have heard. Lois Montagna, débutante daughter of the richest family, next to the Courts, of the Maryland countryside. Lois, who always seemed so friendly when they met here and there.

"Don't tell me," she murmured witheringly, "that you broke off their engagement, too."

Michael shook her, as if exasperated beyond control. "Little fool! He broke it himself, when he met you. Just as he'll break with you when he meets some other girl who attracts him. Ron has yet to show me that he knows the meaning of the word honor."

She jerked violently out of his grasp. "I see one thing!" she cried passionately. "You're trying to poison me against Ronny. But you can't do it, Michael Court. I'm going to marry him, unless he tells me with his own lips that he wants me to release him."

She took another step backward. "I know he won't come into his inheritance until he's twenty-five. And I don't care about that, either. If necessary, I'll sell this wolf farm so Ron can go on with his music. We'll show you if marriage will interfere with his career. Once he's free of your—your bullying, he'll be all right. You'll see!"

Michael Court's face cleared suddenly, surprisingly. His laugh rang clear, and it was somehow more insulting than his anger. "Thus speaks the wisdom of twenty years. Sorry, Cynthia. I'm always forgetting you're just a baby. Well, I won't annoy you any more, today."

He lifted his hand in mocking salute

and strode off down the hillside path to his car. And the girl watched, trembling, as he went.

CYNTHIA sat tense on the deep soft couch in her living room, eyes glued upon the grandfather clock in the hall. It had just chimed eight. Surely Ronny would come any minute now?

She shut her heart to the thought that he might never come again. What would she do without him? They had been together every day or evening, all through the summer. Riding the beautiful Court thoroughbreds around the countryside, climbing the hills together, picnicking. Ronny adoring her.

No, nothing short of barred windows and doors would keep him away. Cynthia thought, if all else failed, Michael Court was capable even of that.

Suddenly a car's powerful headlights flooded the windows; a screaming of brakes, the scuff of tires on gravel. Ronny! No one else would swing around that curve of driveway so recklessly.

Heart pounding exultantly, Cynthia flew out onto the veranda, down the steps and into his arms. "Ronny! Oh, darling, I knew you'd come!"

He held her close, in arms that trembled a little. His voice was wondering and amazed. "But I thought you'd be angry. Mike said—"

"Angry!" She looked up at him. His face was white in the moonlight, his blue eyes gleamed brilliantly, his hair was like a sleek golden cap.

"Because I let him come to you this afternoon instead of myself. But I couldn't, Cyn. We had a rotten row when he got home last night."

"I'm glad he came, dear. Because it gave me the chance to tell him what I thought of him. And it gave me the chance to show him our marriage wouldn't interfere with your music."

He laughed, a little embarrassed. "I don't get this. Maybe you'd better tell me what all happened."

And so they went up to the porch swing and she told him what all had happened. He listened without comment, until she told him they could live on her allowance; that she was willing to sell the wolf farm so that he could study under Corelli in New York.

"But I'm not a gigolo, Cyn," he protested. "Besides, it would take thousands for Corelli."

"I was offered fifty thousand," she told him. "Surely that's enough until you get your inheritance?"

It would be an investment, really, she said. Because of course he would study hard, once they were married. They could elope, and maybe then Michael Court would relent. Or even if he didn't, they'd show him!

She talked on and on, eagerly suggesting this and that, until she grew conscious of his withdrawn silence.

"That is if you still want to marry me, Ronny?" she asked bewilderedly.

He swept her to him so fiercely that it crushed the breath from her. "Sure I do, Cyn," he muttered tensely. "I think you've got something in that elopement idea. But we'd have to do it right away, tonight. Could you be ready in a couple hours? Throw some things into a bag. I'll dash up home and do the same."

She could scarcely breathe for the happiness singing in her veins. He did love her! Oh, she was mad to have doubted him.

"I can be ready," she said, lifting her radiant face, "in half an hour."

Abruptly he stood up. "But look, sweet. I may be longer. No telling

what I might run into up home. And for gosh sake, don't telephone, even if you think I'm never coming. I'll be here as soon as I can make it."

He drew her up to him and crushed his mouth fiercely against hers, his long slender musician's fingers threading through her hair, holding her head back as they always did when he kissed her. It thrilled her to her very toes, that vibrant, caressing hand, those lips burning hotly against hers.

She stood gazing after the tail lights of his car until it swung onto the highway. Then her eyes, soft and shining, followed its path of headlights through the deep grove of cedars, up the hill toward Court mansion.

MIDNIGHT. For three hours, Cynthia had been ready and waiting. She wore a soft blue woolen sports suit, with white leather collar and cuffs, and matching Robin Hood hat. Her bags stood packed in the hall. She had written a note to Amanda, her housekeeper, and put it on the kitchen table.

Cynthia felt a little sad and lonely as she waited, because she would so very much have liked to waken Amanda, who had been like a mother to her since her own mother died. She wanted to tell her of her plans.

Then, remembering how hard Amanda had tried to hide her disapproval of Ronny, Cynthia smiled wistfully. It was only because of his arrogant young gaiety, his devil-may-care charm that was so much a part of him. Well, he would show everybody, once he was married, that he could shoulder a man's responsibilities.

The grandfather clock in the hall chimed one. Centuries later, it chimed two. Cynthia fought back the panic rising slowly within her. It could not possibly strike again before he came.

But it did. Three o'clock. That was when she gave up waiting for him for the night.

It was almost as if he'd had a premonition of something happening, she thought. "No telling what I might run into. Don't call. I'll come as soon as I can." If only she knew what had happened!

Slowly she went out into the hall, picked up her bags and went upstairs to her bedroom. Always afterward, she wondered what had made her forget the note for Amanda on the kitchen table. She sat at her window until dawn tipped the distant eastern hills.

Of course she had to explain, at breakfast. "It's that ogre of a stepbrother of his," she confided laughingly. "Ronny doesn't want him to know until it's all over. If only he'd stayed in Africa where he belonged, we'd have been married properly, the way you've always wanted me to be."

"Why don't he want Mister Michael to know?" mumbled Amanda, under her breath. "Seems to me he ought to come straight out with it."

"Because Mister Michael," Cynthia repeated sardonically, "apparently thinks Ronny's still in his toddling clothes and hasn't a mind of his own. Moreover," she chattered on, "he's a throw-back to the Dark Ages, or whatever age it was when people chained other people in dungeons on a bread and water diet."

She grinned suddenly. "I think the very nicest part of the whole thing will be seeing his face, when we get back and tell him we're married."

"If I ever got married," commented Amanda drily, "I wouldn't say that would be the very nicest part—seeing another man's face when I got back." And then she went out to feed the wolves.

Cynthia stared thoughtfully at her broad, ample figure waddling up the low hill, and wondered why she wanted to cry. This getting married was a kind of lonely business, when you weren't quite sure even that your bridegroom would come.

Well, she'd better stop all this self-pity, because Ronny would be here any minute now.

Once again, she got into the blue wool suit with the white leather collar and cuffs. Once again, her bags stood packed and ready.

All day long, she moved from the living room to the hall; from the telephone to the front door. What was happening up on Court Hill? It was terrible, not to know.

At a quarter to eight that night, she put on her hat. Ronny always came around eight o'clock. Maybe it was a habit, she thought crazily. A habit he couldn't break, even for his wedding.

When the doorbell rang at last she sat for the fraction of a moment, unable to move or even breathe. Then, tears of joy, of singing relief, flooding her eyes, she flew to the door and tore it open.

It opened upon Michael Court. His arm shot out against it, when she would have slammed it shut again in his face.

She backed away in horror, as he came in and closed the door behind him. His eyes flicked the traveling bags at his feet, her tense blond slimness in the suit and hat.

"I expected to find something like this," he muttered harshly, his dark eyes blazing. "You're waiting for Ron, aren't you? You've been waiting for him since he left here last night."

He came slowly toward her and she backed away from him until the newel post at the stairway stopped her.

"I'm going to visit a college friend," she invented quickly. "What right have you to come and question me?"

He was beside her, close. His voice was low and tense. "You're lying, Cynthia Kilburn. You're not going to visit a college friend. Not with those brown eyes so wide and deep and tortured. You're waiting for Ronald, because he promised to marry you last night. The only difference was, he actually did marry Lois Montagna."

"You lie!" Cynthia cried violently. "This is just another scheme of yours to keep Ronny and me apart."

She started toward the door. His arm shot in front of her, barring her progress. "Where are you going?"

She stared at him, eyes gleaming, blond head defiant. "To your house—to Ronny. He'd be with me now, if you weren't keeping him away."

"My dear!" he murmured, bending his head toward her. "Don't. Call Lois' mother. She'll tell you."

Leaning against him as if terribly tired, Cynthia stared dazedly at his moving lips, and knew at last that it was true. Ronny, her gay, adorable, beloved Ronny, had been forced into a loveless marriage by this cruel man.

She saw, for the first time, how Michael's black shining hair grew down into a widow's peak on his forehead. What was it they said about people with widow's peaks? Something about the hand of destiny upon them? That they were lucky?

Lucky! She hoped that he could feel the hatred flowing from her to him, like a stream of liquid fire.

"Cynthia, will you marry me tomorrow?"

She stared at him, her breath choking back in her throat. His face had a shut-in expression; it was the stiff, tense mask a man might wear who had played his last card.

"Love is so many things," he went on, with a grim smile. "And sometimes it's not very clear which kind we feel, until it's over. But the end of every love is a little death. I'll never ask you for any kind, until you're ready to give it to me."

There came the mournful howl of a wolf up on the hill. That would be Jock, thought Cynthia. Her timber wolf, the only one she had never been able to tame. Chained to a post in the center of a wide area, he prowled unceasingly, round and round and round. Like his wild ancestors, circling their prey before the kill.

Cynthia stared at Michael a long moment without speaking, a sly secret smile curving her pale lips.

Then she said slowly, "Yes, I—think I'll marry you."

THEY stood together, the next morning, before the justice of the peace in the little Maryland town of Michael's birth. The bride was as white and cold as if she had been carved from marble.

She wore a simple little frock of amber crêpe, a soft brown fur bolero, a matching doll's hat atop her glistening hair. She looked like a symphony in gold and brown, until you looked at her eyes and mouth. Her eyes were bright and hard and gleaming coldly, and her lips still wore their sly and secret smile.

Michael stood very straight in his perfectly tailored tweeds, a shy smile in his black eyes, a shy smile on his firm, attractive lips. And his hand trembled a little as he put the ring on Cynthia's finger.

He didn't kiss her when it came time. He just laid his cheek against hers, hard.

Cynthia held herself tense, scarcely able to endure his embrace. His arms dropped from her abruptly.

He was quite pale beneath his bronze, when he stood beside his car a moment later and opened the door for her. He smiled appealingly.

"We've made no plans. Would you like a trip somewhere? I know you feel very bitter toward me, right now. But I repeat my promise of last night—I'll never force myself on you."

Cynthia heard him out, without really hearing him. Then power flooded her veins in a dizzying surge and she said slowly:

"You'll never live long enough to hear me say I love you. Last week, I wouldn't have believed that things like this could happen. I never knew that men like you existed—ruthless, cruel, selfish men. I'll never live with you, in a million years.

"And how do you like that, Mr. Michael Court? You, in whose illustrious family there has never been divorce. Married to a woman who left you on your wedding day!"

She turned and walked away from him.

ALL during that fall, Cynthia did not once venture into town. She knew the whole countryside was aflame with curiosity over the marriage. Amanda had hinted as much. And once she had said reprovingly that it was "beyond her understanding how a fine upstanding man like Mr. Kilburn could have such a pig-headed daughter."

She began to receive a number of invitations to dinner, to parties, from the elect of county society. She knew they came because she was Mrs. Michael Court, now.

But since in her heart she was not really Mrs. Michael Court and never would be, she penned her regrets to

all of them. She could not help wondering if Michael accepted, and what explanations he made for his absent wife.

She spent her time attending to her wolves, and taking long hikes over the hills beyond her farm. Nature was lavish with warm, glorious days that fall, and more than ever, Cynthia missed the canters she used to take with Ronny, on the Court thoroughbreds. One afternoon, she drove over to the little

"Michael and I think it is best for you and Ronny to see each other. We are willing to step aside"
So she had won, Cynthia thought. But along with it ran another thought: "Michael is through with me"

riding academy several miles away, rented a horse and cantered along the low valley roads and up the hill paths until almost dark.

The next morning a groom arrived from Court Hill, with a beautiful black mare. Michael's note read:

> You would give me great pleasure if you would accept this horse as your own. My stableman will bring her to you whenever you wish.

Cynthia sent the groom and the horse back to Court Hill, and did not answer the note. After that, except when the weather was unfit, she took the keenest delight in riding every day on one of the academy horses. She would show him!

And then the deep snows came, putting a stop to her riding, even her hiking. She sat one evening in mid-December, curled in a deep chair before her blazing hearth, brooding and bitter and lonely. She had kept pushing her thoughts back, filling her days with this and that, but now they had caught up with her.

Her meditation was not pleasant. Yes, she was showing Michael Court. But just what was she showing him? She had her revenge. She had crushed his pride, perhaps broken his life as he had broken hers when he tore Ronny from her. She still firmly believed that he was responsible for Ronny's marriage.

But why had Michael married her? She sat up suddenly. Why had he? Not for love, certainly. Not to keep Ronny from her forever, because Ronny was gone, anyway. Why, then?

Out of pity, perhaps? No, he was too cold, too heartless for that.

She leaned back, shaken. Oh, it was this loneliness, this terrible emptiness; the bitterness she felt toward Michael and the love she still bore in her heart for Ronny, that made her wonder if she could go on. She wondered if those things would ever entirely leave her, as long as she remained here. Perhaps if she went to New York for a month or two, saw some good shows, shopped, she might return more reconciled.

Would Ronny and his wife come home for Christmas? She hardly thought so. Strange that he had never written. Still, not so strange. He was perhaps trying to make the best of his forced marriage.

That night, she decided she would leave for New York the day after Christmas.

ON Christmas Eve, Michael came. Cynthia, in a lovely velvet house coat of the new flamingo shade, with voluminous bishop sleeves, was helping Amanda trim a small table tree at the living room windows.

When the doorbell rang, Cynthia said, "Who—oh, it's probably the man from the mission, for those baskets. Get them for him, please."

But Amanda returned with Michael, and an enormous box of candy that he had given her in the hall.

Cynthia's first wild thought was, "I'd forgotten how stunning he is!" She stared at him standing there under the archway, white mufflered, his cheeks snow-stung and glowing, his hair so black and shining, but no less shining than his dark eyes.

Amanda was thanking him delightedly for his gift, and then Cynthia was alone with him. Her heart pounded sickeningly as he advanced slowly toward her, his eyes never once leaving hers.

"May I stay a few moments?" he asked softly.

She managed to shrug indifferently.

He removed his topcoat and muffler, and she saw that he was in evening dress. He drew a chair closer to hers before the fireplace.

"You're lovely tonight," he said, looking at her. "Like a gold-tipped flame in that gown."

She murmured a polite "Thank you" and lowered her eyes quickly to the blazing fire.

The silence was unbroken for a long moment. Then he said, "I came to ask you for a Christmas present. I'd like you to have dinner with me tomorrow up on the hill. Would you, Cynthia?"

His voice held a note of gaiety, yet she sensed he made it so only by an effort.

"I'm sorry," she said tightly. "Amanda counts on my being here, and she'd be disappointed. I'm leaving for New York immediately after Christmas."

"Staying long?"

"Perhaps indefinitely." Why had she said that? She wasn't staying indefinitely.

Michael stood up. He took a step toward the fireplace and stared down into it, his back to her, his hands clenched at his sides. "I could arrange my dinner," he said low, "at an hour that would not conflict with yours. There would be just you and me."

His hand went out ruefully, then dropped again. "My old house rattles and shakes with lonelines, Cynthia. It's lonely for the kind of love that makes a house a home."

Stiffening with an unnamable fear, Cynthia half rose from her chair, not realizing that she moved at all.

Michael whirled around, pulled her fiercely into his arms and held her head hard against his shoulder, his face buried in her hair.

"I love you so terribly!" he whispered hoarsely. "Surely you must know. Not a night has passed since you've been my wife, that I haven't stood outside those windows over there, looking in at you. Not a day that I haven't seen you somewhere, riding, hiking, feeding your wolves. Sometimes I've wondered if you couldn't feel my love pouring out to you."

She stood rigid within his arms. "I think you must—be crazy, Michael Court."

"Yes! Crazy for you!" His head dropped to her shoulder, his face, hot and flushed, pressed against her throat. "Hungry for you, Cynthia, until I can't endure it any longer. A condemned man is given at least one chance. Give me mine."

"You didn't give me a chance!" She flattened her hands against his hard breast, straining backward in his arms. "Nor Ronny. You didn't give us a chance when we wanted it. Why should I give you one?"

He set his teeth. "You'll have the straight of it all tomorrow. I didn't tell you before, because you wouldn't have believed me. But I'll make you believe me—if you'll dine with me, Cynthia?"

She considered. Why not? She might hear something of Ronny. She might hear that his marriage had fallen through.

"I will," she decided, "if there won't be a repetition of this scene. Because I warn you, nothing you say will change the fact that I loathe you for what you did to Ronny and me. I've wondered why you married me. Perhaps it *was* because you thought you loved me. But that only makes what you did more terrible."

And yet, even as she spoke, there surged within her a warm denial. "Take care!" a voice seemed to warn. "Are you so sure of your hate?" Oh,

what was happening to her! It was his forceful, magnetic nearness. If only he would go.

His arms dropped from her. He went over and picked up his topcoat from the chair. Then he turned.

"Thank you," he said drily.

As if in a daze, she followed him into the hall, stood silent as he put on his coat. But as he reached the door, her hand went out involuntarily and touched his arm.

"I'm sorry, Michael." She didn't know why she said it, except that he looked so terribly lonely and she knew what it was to be lonely.

"Sorry!" He laughed. "Sorry for what, Cynthia? That you're my wife? That you've given me dreams of heaven? Sorry for what?"

Then, as if driven beyond control, his arms flashed out, swept her crushingly against him. He rained kisses on her throat, her face, her hair. The soft velvet of her gown slipped from her shoulders and he kissed their satin smoothness.

And then her mouth! Deep, long, clinging kisses. Terrible, wonderful kisses. The hard feel of his arms around her, straining her closer to his trembling body. Madness! Ecstasy!

Time had stopped. The world danced and whirled about her as they stood locked, mouth crushed to mouth.

"Now you hate me more than ever, don't you?" he whispered savagely, his breath hot against her face. "But I don't see why you shouldn't know!"

He was gone.

A long teakwood settee stood in the hall near the door. Cynthia stumbled over to it, sank back upon it. Her body tingled, her heart pounded madly within her. The moments sped.

What would she do with this revelation of Michael's love? She could not take it; she felt no answering love for him. The thing she felt was too terrible, too frightening to be love.

Love was a song sung lightly, gaily, as she and Ronny had sung it. This other was like a swirling, sucking whirlpool, luring her, waiting to engulf her.

No, it was not love that Michael felt for her. It was too intense. It would burn itself out soon. And she must not see him again. Certainly she would not dine there alone with him tomorrow, when the very sight of her seemed to feed his passion so terribly.

And so on Christmas morning she sent a polite note of regret to Michael on Court Hill. She ate her Christmas dinner alone with Amanda, and spent the rest of the day packing for her trip to New York.

THREE days later, Cynthia stood at the windows of her hotel bedroom, high over Fifth Avenue, watching the wind-driven snow eddy and swirl over the teeming traffic, far below.

Well, she was here. For three days and nights she had been here. But already she had learned that it would not matter where she went; that bitter, aching feeling of aloneness would follow her. It seemed worse now than ever before.

If only she could strike out at the cause of it. But what *was* the cause of it? Ronny? Michael? Her own vindictiveness that had so long eaten like a cancerous growth within her?

And then her thoughts scattered at the ringing of the phone. It was the desk clerk. "Mrs. Court to see you, Miss Kilburn. Shall I send her up?"

Stunned, Cynthia thought she had misunderstood. He meant Mr. Court, of course. Michael had followed her.

"No!" she gasped into the phone. "Tell him I'm not in."

"But it's a lady, Miss Kilburn. Mrs. Ronald Court."

Ronny's wife! Dear Heaven, she had forgotten.

A few minutes later, she was opening the door to Lois. A terribly changed Lois from the one she had known down home in Maryland. The same slender, dark-haired girl, but how desperately unhappy she looked!

"You'll forgive me," she said quietly, "for intruding like this. But I don't think you'll mind, after I explain."

Cynthia murmured, "Won't you sit down?"

The girl sat stiffly on the edge of a chair, loosened her fur coat. She began talking in a low, strained voice.

"Michael sent me. He phoned me last night that you were here. He—we decided that under the circumstances it would be best for you and Ronny to see each other. Michael is willing to set you free, and I'm willing to divorce Ronny if it's what you both want."

She looked up at Cynthia, with eyes from which all youth had fled. "I never dreamed that you and he were planning to marry. He never told me. I always thought his bitterness, his unhappiness were because of Michael. He's always resented Michael's being his guardian."

"Some people," murmured Cynthia, "do resent having their lives ordered for them. A person has his rights as an individual."

Lois smiled faintly. "You talk like Ronny. And all Michael and I have ever wanted him to do was to keep on with his music. He has the talent to become great, but he's only wasting it. He promised when we were married that he would study, so we went to Paris. He was interested only in girls—any little cocotte he could pick up from the streets. Back here, it's the same. He seems to take delight in taunting me that he can do as he pleases, just as he's always taunted Michael."

She got up, drew her coat around her. "We haven't been living together for a month. He has an apartment down in Greenwich Village. I wrote Michael last week that I couldn't stand it any longer, I was going to Reno. And then he phoned and told me about you and Ronny. We both think that maybe you're what Ronny needs to make something of himself."

She raised tortured eyes to Cynthia. "I phoned Ronny this morning and told him I might bring you to see him. He wants you to come. And you mustn't let the thought that you're breaking up a home stop you. There's no home to break up, you see. Will you go with me now?"

Cynthia went, in a daze of conflicting emotions. She did not try to separate them, or name them. Later, perhaps. Things were happening with too terrifying swiftness now.

The drive across town, Lois sitting silently beside her. The cab stopping finally before a dilapidated old curio shop. A flight of stairs, dark and enclosed, a door opening into a long smoke-clouded, bizarrely furnished room that seemed filled to overflowing with studio couches, highball glasses, men and girls lolling in each other's arms.

And Ronny! Blond hair disheveled, coatless, collar opened at the neck, he pushed a flaming haired girl from his lap and stood up, weaving slightly.

"Well! My wife and my sweetheart." His blue eyes gleamed mock-

ingly. "Good of you, I'm sure. Scram, gang!"

The gang scrammed, quickly.

Lois said quietly, "I'll leave you two alone now. And anything you decide between you will be all right with me. I might add it will be all right with Michael, too."

She turned to Cynthia. "Can I reach you at your hotel later tonight?"

Cynthia nodded dumbly. She wanted to say wildly, "Don't leave me here with him! He isn't what I want, after all."

But it was too late. Lois had gone.

CYNTHIA stepped backward to avoid Ronny, who was coming toward her with arms outstretched, and sat down abruptly on a studio couch.

He laughed, stretched himself lazily down behind her on the couch and turned her around to him.

"Take off your coat, pet," he said, taking it off for her. "And stay here beside me. I won't let you get up, so stop trying to."

He grinned derisively as he held her. "So you're Mrs. Michael Court now. Tell me all about it, baby. He always gets what he wants, doesn't he? How did he get you finally—chloroform?"

"No, he didn't chloroform me," she said slowly. Poor Ronny, so dissipated, not seeming to care for anything. Had Michael, by forcing him to marry a girl he didn't love, actually done this terrible thing to him? She knew now that such an act could wreck a person's life. It was wrecking hers.

She looked at him pityingly. "Tell me, Ronny, how did Michael force you to marry Lois if you didn't want to?"

"Force?" He stared at her, his eyes narrowing. Then he laughed shortly. "The way he's always forced me. By threatening to cut off the measly allowance he gives me."

Watching her closely, he went on "I knew we couldn't make a go of it on your money so—well, I married Lois for hers. But she's hanging on to it—thinks she can make me do as she likes that way. Trying to order my life the way Mike did."

He added petulantly, "Anyway, I guess it didn't break your heart when I didn't come back. You married Mike quick enough."

And then, bewildered, pitying him, she explained why she had married Michael and that she had never really been his wife.

Ronny jerked upright and swept her into his arms, his eyes gleaming. "Look, Cyn! You said once you'd sell your farm for me. Do it now. Then we'll go away together, and after they divorce us we'll marry. Cyn, do it!"

She stared at him. "You don't know what you're saying. We can't go anywhere together until we're married."

He laughed derisively. "This is 1939. Get wise, Cyn. Don't be a prude all your life."

She jerked out of his arms and ran toward the door. But he got there before her, locked the door and then tossed the key nonchalantly in his hand.

"You don't think I'm letting you get away from me now, do you? Honey, if the opportunity had been made to order, it couldn't be better. You're staying here all night with me, see? And tomorrow I'll let old Mike know all about it. Lois, too. I think maybe it'll turn out to be quite a nice investment."

"And to think," she breathed, "that I ever thought I loved you."

He laughed, went over and sat down

on the couch. "You'll love me again, Cyn. Girls have, before. But don't worry about me touching you. That's not what I'm after. Sit down, girl. Relax."

She sat down because there wasn't anything else to do. Ronny was wrong, of course. He couldn't hurt Michael by keeping her here all night. Not now. Because Michael was done with her; he wanted to divorce her. The first divorce in the Court family! Or would Ronny's be first? Her head throbbed.

It grew dark, and Ronnie got up and snapped on a floor lamp. Then he went back to his couch and lay watching her.

Neither moved again, all night long. Ronny spoke occasionally, but Cynthia didn't answer him. Finally she closed her eyes, not dreaming that she would sleep at all. But when she opened them again, it was bright morning, and Ronny was bending over her.

"You look kind of foggy," he said. "Maybe you'd better freshen up a bit before our company comes."

Cynthia pressed deeper into her chair away from him. "I'm not interested in your company. All I want is to get out of here. You've had your night, now let me go."

"Not yet! I think you'll be interested in this company. It's Mike and Lois."

"But Michael's in Maryland!"

Ronny laughed. "He's been here for two days. Lois said so, when she called at two o'clock this morning, wanting to know where you were. She seemed sufficiently shocked when I told her you'd decided to stay all night with me. I think he will be, too."

"What a beast you are, Ronny Court! But if you expect to hurt Michael, I'm afraid you've troubled yourself needlessly. It doesn't matter to him what I do."

"And it's breaking your heart, isn't it?"

She looked up at him breathlessly. He wasn't jeering; he was deadly serious. "You sound," she whispered, "as if you thought I loved him."

"You do love him."

The words tore through her like flame. She thought for a moment she was going to faint, from the tumult of emotion shaking her. She buried her face in her arms and crouched there, trembling in the revelation of her love for Michael. Her mad, overwhelming love for him, revealed to her through another man's words!

Probably she had been in love with Michael from the beginning, not knowing, always fighting it. That was why his nearness had been so unbearable.

She remembered that passion-swept night when he had begged her to love him, if only a little, if only in pretense. And she knew that she would give her life to live that night over again.

Ronny's mocking voice came as if from a distance. "Don't tell me you didn't know your own heart!"

There was the scrape of a key in the lock. The door opened and Michael stood there. Lois was close behind him.

RONNY straightened, grinning maliciously. "Greetings!" he said. "Well, brother, what are you willing to pay for my night of love? My night of love with your wife? It ought to be worth about fifty thousand, I should say, to keep the grand old name of Court out of the tabloids."

Without haste, Michael came forward into the room. His hand went out, gripped Ronny's coat and pulled him toward him.

"It isn't worth a dime," he said, with slow, terrifying softness. "But something else is—the truth. Tell her

the truth now, or I'll break you to pieces."

Ronny gasped. "But you can't do this. I'll—I'll tell the papers everything I know."

Michael's fine mouth curved in a sneer. "Go ahead. The Court name's old enough and proud enough to stand a little mud-slinging. But of course you won't get another cent out of me if you play that kind of a fool, nor out of Lois, either." His grip on Ronny tightened. "Now talk!"

The younger man's face was sullen, but scared, too. His voice was low, and he kept his eyes averted.

"I made love to you last summer, Cynthia," he began, "to get even with Mike. He fell in love with you last February, when you came to Maryland. But he was leaving for Africa right away. I thought if I could make you fall for me while he was gone, and turn you against him, it would be a hot one on him.

"Then when he came back, I told him you loved me, but that I was leaving for—new pastures. I said you'd be broken-hearted, and maybe he'd better tell you he was sending me away to study music. I knew you'd believe he was separating us, and hate him for it."

Cynthia could not tear her eyes from him. His face was flushed now and shamed. Hurriedly he went on.

"After he saw you, he told me that if he thought for a minute you'd be happy with me, he'd give me my inheritance out of his own money and let me marry you. But he said I wasn't man enough to make any woman happy."

Lois' voice came in a choked whisper from across the room. "You could be if you wanted to, Ronny!"

He looked at her a moment in startled gratitude. Then he turned again to Cynthia. "I took my hate for Mike out on you. That's why I saw you again that night. I knew he loved you, and I wanted to make sure he'd never stand a chance with you. So I told you he was trying to make me marry Lois, when I'd already decided to elope with her."

"Oh!" Wildly, humiliatingly, Cynthia's thoughts flew back to that night when she had begged Ronny to elope with her. And he had agreed, while all the time he was planning to marry Lois.

He said, "Forgive me, Cyn. Mike had nothing to do with it."

She gazed up at Michael as he stood with his back to her.

"Why didn't you tell me the truth, Michael?" she whispered.

He released Ronny and swung slowly around toward her. His face was cold, set. His lips were white.

"Well, there's always Reno," he suggested. "Thank Heaven for Reno—right? Maybe you'll find happiness with Ronny, if you marry him. But forgive me if I doubt it."

Cynthia stared at him as if spellbound.

"You fool!" Ronny sneered. "Can't you see it's you—"

Cynthia didn't hear any more. She was halfway down the stairs by the time Ronny could betray her love for Michael.

SHE had been home a week when Amanda said, one night, "Did I mention I saw Mr. Michael in town yesterday? He came home two days ago."

Curled in a deep chair in front of her fireplace, Cynthia did not answer. She sat there a long time motionless after Amanda had gone to bed. She

sat watching the flames leaping, crackling, but she neither saw nor heard them, really.

She saw only Michael's face there; his deep eyes; his black shining hair; his beautiful mouth that could say such terrible things.

Well, it was nice that some happiness might come out of the whole horrible mess. That letter she had received from Lois today, saying that she and Ronny were beginning over again. Hoping to build new happiness upon the wreck of their marriage.

And Michael had been home two whole days. He knew now, how terribly she loved him. Up there alone, was he planning to divorce her? To find, with some other woman, the kind of love "that makes a house a home"?

She jerked to her feet, beating her hands together desperately. He had loved her like that once. She would make him love her again. He was her husband still. If she went up there and stayed with him, he couldn't divorce her!

She flew into the hall, pulled on her fur coat, her crimson béret, her woolen gloves, with frantic haste.

It was cold, and the snow cracked with brittleness as she walked along the road. The moon was a great round silver ball, high over Michael's house on the hill. How beautiful it looked in the moonlight, almost surrounded by towering, snow-laden pines, lights shining mellowly from its windows.

She turned up the cedar-lined driveway, eyes glued to the treacherous ground. So she did not see Michael coming until he stood directly in front of her, blocking her path.

"Oh!" she gasped stupidly. "I was just coming up."

"Why?" he demanded.

She met his eyes appealingly. "To ask you," she said low, remembering his words of Christmas Eve, "to try to love me again, if only a little. To ask you even to pretend, if you must. Only give me a chance—"

Her voice broke. She buried her face in her hands. "I love you so, Michael."

Slowly he took her left hand, drew off its glove. Then he drew off her wedding ring. She sank her teeth into her lower lip to keep from crying out.

"Now say that again," he commanded low, vibrantly. "Tell me again that you love me."

"Oh, I do, Michael," she whispered tremulously, her eyes adoring him. "So terribly! I don't know when it began. I only know that you're the sun and moon and stars to me. You're my life. I never felt this way toward Ronny."

"I know." He smiled, put the ring back on her finger. "Love is so many things," he reminded her softly. "And sometimes it's not very clear which kind we feel, until it's over. But now you're going to know the kind of love that will never be over."

He drew her into his arms and pressed his cheek hard against hers, the way he did when they were married. His mouth moved across her cheek until it found her mouth and lay there like a deep, slow flame. Which wasn't at all the way he did when they were married.

Some time later, he raised his head long enough to whisper, "Am I a good pretender?"

And she whispered back, "If that's pretense, don't ever show me what real love is. I couldn't stand it."

"I'll show you," he warned, his eyes deep and black and passionate. "And you'll stand it."

One arm still around her, he turned and led her up toward the house on the hill.

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Stop! Go!

By MARYJO MILLER

No use chasing a portable Romeo

THE train came to a stop in the Los Angeles station. Joyce bit her lip. Why on earth had she come to California?

She knew well enough why she had. Because everybody in Redville had wanted to know when Dee Scarborough was going to send for her. So, impulsively—she ground her teeth savagely—yes, impulsively she had sent

off that commanding telegram to Dee, telling him to meet her. Telling him, not asking him.

He would be furious with her; he had a temper. He would not meet her. Serve her right. A young man had a right to change his mind about a girl after a year's separation. Particularly when the girl did not know herself, now, if she really wanted him.

She looked lovely and sweet and lost as she stared out the window, afraid Dee would not be there and afraid to meet him if he had come.

But the passengers had to walk through a tunnel before waiting friends, relatives and sweethearts could greet them.

Joyce followed the crowd with a bumping heart. Her eyes shone bluer than ever between their dark, curled-back lashes. Her brown curls bobbed a little under the small black hat with the long green quill. The feather matched the green suède belt on her black dress. Her red mouth held a smile to cover that awful feeling inside that kept saying, "Maybe Dee isn't the man for you."

She could have wrung her hands at that impulsive act, but they were busy carrying a suitcase, a black coat and an immense black handbag.

She walked up the ramp and found a hundred eager people waiting. Her eyes covered them quickly.

No Dee. So he was angry. She felt terribly alone.

She walked into the large waiting-room. What she needed was a drink of water. Maybe the traffic he complained of so in his letters had held him up. She would wait a few minutes. And she did need a drink.

She found the bubbler, took a drink and backed up into a very solid someone.

"I beg your pardon," she muttered and walked away with the impression of a tweed suit the color of the bark of Western pines and a figure that stood as straight as they grew. She did not know why she should think of pines except that only yesterday she had ridden through thousands of them in Northern California.

She sat down on one of the benches with her bag on the floor and looked up to find the tweed suit walking around the bench staring at her.

She felt suddenly disappointed that a young man who could remind her of anything so clean as a pine tree should be a flirt.

A fine welcome she was receiving in this glamorous land of sunshine and movie stars. He was good-looking, too! Irregular features, but nice. And black hair and brows with nice (how could they be nice?) warm brown eyes.

Here he was again, on his second lap. He would speak to her now. And she would squelch him so thoroughly he would never look at another girl with a freckled nose and blue eyes.

"Excuse me, but are you Miss Chapman?" he asked.

"What?" Joyce looked up, startled.

"I asked," he repeated patiently, "if you are Miss Chapman. I'm looking for a Miss Joyce Chapman. From Greenville, Iowa."

"Why?" she asked. "And it's not Greenville. It's Redville."

"I beg your pardon for the error, Miss Chapman." He apologized politely, but coolly. "My name is Harwood. I'll take you to your hotel." He picked up her bag.

Joyce jumped up. "I haven't got a hotel." Goodness, he was sudden. Who was he? Or rather, who did he think he was, grabbing her bag that way?

"Dee Scarborough has one picked out for you." He took long strides through the station.

"Oh, he has!" She ran after him. "Where is Mr. Scarborough? Say, wait a minute. I have two more bags. I checked them."

"Then give me the checks." He held out a hand, hardly glancing over his shoulder at her as he headed for the baggageroom.

She could barely keep up with his long strides. She jabbed the tickets into his hand, but still he refused to look at her.

"Where did you say Dee is?"

"I didn't say."

"Is he all right?" she felt suddenly anxious.

"Good heavens, yes. He couldn't get down to meet your train, so he sent me."

"Sweet of him. But not so sweet for you," she added.

He turned to look at her now. "No," he agreed.

Joyce felt distinctly squelched. So squelched she would never look at another young man in a tweed suit who reminded her of a pine tree.

She lifted her chin at a haughty angle. "I suppose there are taxis in Los Angeles as well as in other towns, so you won't have to take me to my hotel, Mr. Hardwood."

"The name is Harwood." He squinted his eyes at her as they stopped at the baggageroom desk. "But call me what you like. The other might fit me better, don't you think?"

"Why, yes," she agreed coolly. "What's the name of this hotel?"

"I'll take you there," he said. He picked up her other bags and led the way outside. There was nothing for her to do but follow.

She could jump into a taxi and go some place, of course. She had Dee's address. But the pine tree young man was—well, he was not a flirt after all. He even disliked her. Probably despised her.

It must be my wide mouth, she thought. Though Dee had not thought it so terribly wide a year ago. Strange, he could not meet her. He must have either important work to do or a grouchy boss. But why hadn't Mr. Hardwood just said so, in that case?

THEY walked by taxicabs and their drivers waiting for fares.

Yes, I could take a taxi. She eyed the cabs. But no, I had better go with him, just to annoy him, she told herself.

She rode beside him, in a dark red coupé, this year's model, an expensive model. Now and then she glanced at his profile as he kept his eyes on the traffic.

No, he was not very good-looking. He had too much character to be anything like a pretty boy.

But why should she analyze a man who refused to look at her?

A traffic bell rang, a signal flashed and Harwood eased his car to a stop between a sedan and another coupé.

A good-looking brute sat behind the wheel of the coupé, in a plaid jacket and silk muffler. He would have been extremely attractive if it had not been for the dissipated lines under his black eyes.

Joyce stared at him. Her stare caught his eye. An impulse seized her. Her eyes began to twinkle, her lips began to smile. Then she turned on everything she had, and gave it to him in a dazzling come-hither smile that would have melted nails.

He smiled back, wickedly.

Another bell pinged and the car

shot forward so abruptly that Joyce was thrown against the Harwood man.

"So that's the kind of a girl you are," he said between his teeth. His eyes were squinted but not in a smile this time.

"Certainly not." Joyce moved away from his rough sleeve, though for some reason she didn't really want to.

"I met him on the train," she lied.

"Ha!" he said dryly. Then, "I guess Dee knows what he's doing after all."

Joyce's ears perked up. So! Now she would be getting at why Dee had not met her.

"I beg your pardon?" she asked.

"And to think I was feeling so devilish sorry for you, ready to knock Dee's wooden head off for you!"

For some reason this last remark of Mr. Harwood's pleased her. A pleasant warm sensation started to spread right in the center of her breast. So he would knock Dee's wooden head off?

But what was that about Dee knowing what he was doing? Harwood implied that the other man was trying to put something over on her.

"You mean—" She felt lonely again. Her blue eyes clouded and showed it. Her soft red mouth drooped at the corners and could not deny it.

Bud Harwood's black brows drew together.

"I'm sorry," he said. "The trouble with me," as if scolding himself, "is that I talk too much. And the trouble with Dee is that he became lonesome for you. So, like a fool, he started taking another girl out. But we'll take care of that."

"We?"

"Yes. You and I. Won't we?" He looked at her.

She looked up into his dark eyes. He really wanted to help her. He had thought that the lonesome look in her face had meant she wanted Dee badly. But it was not that. She did not know whether she did want him. At the thought that he would not welcome her, she had begun to feel the first real pangs of homesickness. That was the real trouble. She had never been so far from home and friends before in her twenty young years.

"What shall we do?" she asked.

"That's easy," Bud said. "Whatever she has, whatever she does, we'll go her one better."

"What has she got?" Joyce wanted to know, a bit scared.

Bud hesitated. "I haven't met the girl yet, but Dee says she's beautiful."

"Oh," Joyce said weakly. And she thought, I'm to go her one better, with a freckled nose with a bump on the end, and a mouth that could be a size or two smaller.

"She has money," he added.

"Oh," Joyce said again. She had one hundred dollars in traveler's checks and that was all. Her father and mother ran a small grocery store in Redville, so there was no wiring home for more.

"One fellow joined the Navy to see the world and forget her," Bud went on. "She has social background and wears clothes like Claudette Colbert."

"I could, too, if I had them," Joyce mumbled. Hastily she added, "A lovely girl," and smiled a sweet smile.

"I'm anxious to meet her myself," the man said.

Oh, you are! Joyce thought, and frowned, feeling disturbed.

"We'll see them at the Blue Spot for cocktails this afternoon."

"We will!" She started. "But—"

"It's all been arranged."

"You mean—"

But a half hour later, soaking in a

lathery, foamy, bubble bath on the sixth floor of a Hollywood hotel, Joyce had figured out what was what.

So Dee wanted Bud Harwood to bring her to the Blue Spot, and she was to greet Dee as a casual acquaintance she had met back in Iowa. And she was practically engaged to him!

What had California done to Dee? Or had she never really known him?

Of course, she admitted, one did get lonely in a strange city far from home. And the girl was the daughter of Dee's boss. Dee could not refuse her at first small requests, Bud had explained very diligently, if he wanted to keep his job. Then the requests had grown from a coaxing "Have a coke with me, Mr. Scarborough, won't you, please?" to a commanding "We'll go dancing tonight, Dee."

The whole thing sounded distasteful to Joyce. Explaining didn't help. She half wanted to take the next train back to Redville. But she could not do things that way. She had to follow through, finish what she had started.

Besides, Dee had not begged her to come out, in his last seven letters. Only her impulsive nature was to blame. She got out of the tub determinedly. After this she would fight every impulse, no matter what it was. She grabbed a fluffy towel and rubbed herself briskly.

DRESSED in her black dress once more, but this time with a black belt of the dress material and a dazzling sunburst pin of gold points and rhinestone center at the "V" neck, she entered the lobby to meet Bud Harwood. She had thrown a large veil over her hat after removing the green feather. She looked smooth. She had worked at it. Dee liked smooth-looking girls.

"Hi," Bud said. He had changed into a dark blue suit. She felt proud that he was waiting for her, he looked so fine and stood so straight. He was smooth, too.

He appraised her slowly. "You look—slick," he said. He had meant to say something else, she was certain.

Their eyes met. Joyce lowered hers quickly. Her heart had begun to do nip-ups the moment she had looked up into his dark eyes.

"We'll walk over." He took her arm. "It's just around the corner. You'll knock him down in that outfit, Joyce," he told her.

"Do you think so?"

She wanted to tell him she was not sure she still wanted Dee. In fact, she was becoming almost certain she did not. But Bud would think her fickle, after the look she had flung at the fellow in the plaid jacket and silk muffler.

"Now, don't worry," he consoled. He was so sincere that Joyce felt suddenly ashamed. "If I say you can knock him down, you can," he said warmly. "I'll be right there to help you, give you suggestions. Wait until he sees you."

"Yes," she echoed weakly. "Wait." No, she could not tell him now.

They entered the Blue Spot. Dim lights. Blue mirrored walls. Sophisticated faces. Long bobs, swept-up hairdos. Hats of every kind. Men of very kind.

Joyce felt dazzled. She could hardly see, after the bright sunlight. Bud guided her to the bar where stood a girl with red hair, in a beautiful black dress whose bodice was splashed with green sequin leaves that glowed richly under the coral lights.

The girl was laughing—she had beautiful teeth and a deep laugh—at a blond young man with his head lifted.

Yes, that was Dee, Joyce told herself. The same Dee who threw back his head when he looked at you with his gray eyes. But he had a mustache now. And a plaid jacket with a silk muffler.

He felt her eyes upon him and turned his head. His eyes widened ever so slightly. He moved toward her.

"Joyce Chapman!" he exclaimed. He grabbed her hands. "Imagine seeing you here!"

"Yes, imagine," she said. He had done it well. Strange, the touch of his hands no longer thrilled her. No, he was not the same Dee, she decided. He was no longer a fresh young fellow from a small town. He was a young man-about-Hollywood. A jaded young man. She no longer cared for him. It was as finished as that.

"You're Dee—" She hesitated. She could act, too. "Dee Scan—Scab—"

"Scarborough," he looked at her with his head thrown back. "You ought to remember," he said meaningly.

"Of course," she said. Then she glanced at the girl with the red hair piled in curls on a shapely head.

"Oh, Georgiana. I'd like you to meet Miss Chapman, from my home town. Miss Wilson. And by George, it's Bud!" He seemed to see Bud for the first time. "Why didn't you tell me you knew Joyce! Holding out on me!" He slapped Bud on the back.

"I had hoped to keep it quiet from a notorious girl-stealer like you," the other man said dryly.

Dee glanced quickly at Georgiana to see if she had taken that seriously. But the remark had passed her ears. She could only look at Bud with her great big, blue eyes and long, mascaraed lashes.

Bud blinked. Then he grinned. "You might introduce me," he suggested.

"Sorry," Dee said. "Georgiana, this is Bud Harwood. He handles your father's advertising and we play golf together. And Miss Wilson."

She smiled. "Have a cocktail with me?" she invited with curved, red lips. "Dee will want to talk with his old friend."

"It'll be a pleasure," Bud smiled back.

So Joyce sat at the bar on high blue-cushioned stools with Dee.

She felt in a daze. She had thought she was not going to be afraid of this girl, Georgiana Wilson. But she was. Not because the red-headed girl had wanted Dee. But because now she wanted Bud! It was all so evident in those big, blue eyes.

And Joyce wanted him, too. She knew it now.

"Joyce," Dee whispered urgently in her ear. "Will you forgive me for meeting you like this? It had to be this way. She's the boss's daughter and I had to take her to a tennis match this afternoon. I have to take her everywhere. We usually come here for cocktails so I asked Harwood to bring you here. Was it all right?"

"Of course it was all right," she said, hardly hearing his apology. She was intent, shamelessly so, on catching the conversation of Bud and Georgiana. Bud sat next to Joyce, but his back was all but turned on her.

All she could hear was the soft murmur of his voice. And that was like a caress.

She was heartbroken. Why did her world have to turn upside down like this? Was it because she had come out to marry Dee? But she did not owe him anything. All the time she had saved her money to come to him he had been taking this girl out. And he did not have to, either. No man had

to do anything he did not want to. He could have got a new job.

It was not fair that this girl should want Bud, too. Why couldn't she be satisfied with Dee?

And Bud was falling for her. Hadn't he said he wanted to meet her? Hadn't he said she had everything? Clothes, looks, background.

Joyce longed more than ever for Redville, Iowa, the little grocery store, her mother and father. Instead she had a dry martini before her.

"Joyce, darling," Dee whispered. "You look beautiful! You are beautiful. My, I'm glad you came out here. It looks as if Georgiana is taking to Bud fast."

Don't remind me of that! Joyce wanted to cry out. The man went on, "I can accuse her of being a flirt, pretend a broken heart and marry you right now. How about it?"

Joyce could not answer. How could she think when she had just heard Bud murmur, "You've got the loveliest hair in Hollywood, Georgiana."

"And you're dark, darling." Georgiana looked coquettishly at him. "We'd make a fine-looking couple, wouldn't we?"

"Let's dance," Joyce said to Dee.

"All right. Maybe we can talk better out there."

They danced. "I don't want to talk right now," she told him. "Everything is so new and strange. Let me take it all in first."

THEY were finishing a dance when Bud grabbed Joyce for the next one.

For a moment she was breathless.

"I want to get the lowdown," he said. "And make him jealous, too. How are you doing?"

Slowly her breath returned. She felt at home in his strong firm arms. The lonesome feeling vanished like a bad dream. But that would not last long, she thought bitterly. "She" would soon push Joyce out into the cold again.

Another impulse came to her. She was going to fight all impulses, she reminded herself grimly. But it was such a good one, the impulse begged, it might turn the trick. And it might not, she retorted. Nothing ventured, nothing gained, the impulse insisted. Just try me. All right, she would.

She looked up at Bud. "I'm not doing so well," she admitted.

"You're not?" He looked surprised. "I thought you were!"

"No." She shook her head. "He looks only at her, thinks only of her. He thinks she has the most beautiful hair in the world. What, what shall I do now, Bud?"

He frowned.

"She dazzles him with her smile, her flirtatious lips," she went on. "She rolls her eyes and he likes it."

"Then dazzle him with your smile," he said. "Roll your eyes around. They're as big as hers."

"Do you think so?" She rolled her eyes up at him, lowered them abruptly so that he could see her curled lashes. Then she raised them again and looked up at him with a wide, innocent gaze.

"You're so sweet to me, Bud," she murmured. She moved a tiny bit closer to him. Then she smiled. It was the first time she had given him the full power of her smile.

He caught his breath. He smiled back at her. "You're lovely, Joyce," he said huskily. "You can have anyone you want. Only make sure that you really want him, and that he's worth it."

"I'm sure." She looked up at him earnestly. "I know now what I want.

And I know he's worth it. He stands so straight, he's like a Western pine. He has such a clean-cut look and such clear, dark, straightforward eyes."

He looked at her abruptly. "Dee's eyes aren't dark."

"No," she agreed, her heart pounding.

Their eyes met. Georgiana tapped Bud's arm.

"It's my turn," she said, too sweetly, as she took Bud away.

Joyce stood at the edge of the dance floor, boiling with fury. Would that girl never keep herself out of Joyce's affairs?

"Hullo," a soft voice drawled beside her.

She turned away. She was in no mood for more of Dee's apologies or plans. But it was not Dee. It was a young man in a plaid jacket and silk muffler with lines under his hardened black eyes. She could not place him at first. Then she remembered. The fellow she had smiled at so dazzlingly.

"Hello," she echoed in a weak voice.

"I was hoping you'd give me another smile," he coaxed.

"I haven't any more to give away," she said, and her voice was cross.

"Troubles?" he asked.

"Millions of them."

"Have a drink with me and forget them. Down the street," he added. "They mix the best cocktails in Hollywood."

"I have a friend in the other room at the bar," she told him.

"Forget him, too—or her," he suggested with a wink.

She saw Bud with Georgiana, dancing. Bud was looking over Georgiana's shoulder at her. She turned away from the dance floor. What was the use? She could not get him. And she did not want Dee.

"All right," she agreed listlessly. "For five minutes. Then I must go back to my friend."

"A lot can happen in five minutes," he hinted, taking her arm and leading her outside. The sky to the west, above Hollywood Boulevard, was glorious with sunset colors.

"Yes. You can fall in love, but not out," Joyce spoke her thoughts aloud.

He guided her into a parking lot. She looked surprised.

"You can fall in love again." His hand slid down her arm to her hand.

"I'm not made that way." She tried discreetly to pull away. "I thought you said down the street."

"I did. We'll drive down." He opened the door of the coupé she had seen earlier in the day.

A sinking feeling hit the pit of her stomach. It told her not to get into the car.

But gently and firmly he put her in. He walked quickly around to the driver's seat while she sat undecided. It could do no harm, she argued with herself, to ride down the street, then back.

He was beside her. The car faced a wall. The sky was darkening swiftly. There is no twilight in the west. Suddenly he leaned close to her, his arms slid around her shoulders.

"Please!" She faced him coldly. That sinking feeling had turned to fright. Her turning to face him only brought his face closer to hers. His black eyes burned into hers. She could read the desire in them.

She turned cold all over. Her skin contracted.

"Did you smile at me today thinking you would never see me again?" he asked.

"I'm sorry if you misunderstood," she broke out.

"What did you want me to understand? If you meant it as a joke to make the man you were with jealous, it's a joke I don't appreciate."

"I realize I made a mistake." She pushed her hands out against him, hard. She felt dizzy and far away from all that was real and secure.

"You can make amends," he breathed heavily into her face. The more she pushed against him the tighter he grasped her.

"No!" she gasped. "Let me go. I'll make a scene."

"There's no one around," he said.

"No?" a hard voice asked behind Joyce.

Bud! She knew before she turned. Her heart pumped with joy. The fellow let her go.

"Oh, Bud!" She faced him.

Bud jerked open the door.

"Get out!" he ordered.

She felt crushed by his menacing manner. Meekly she got out.

He brushed her rudely aside. Before she could turn she heard a dull crack inside the car. Bud emerged, his eyes squinted. Then he regarded her with a cold stare.

"You didn't—" she gasped.

"I knocked him out," he said. "Whether you like it or not. We're going home, if you're ready." His voice was dry, crisp, hard.

It chilled her. He would despise her now. His eyes plainly branded her as a cheap, common, out-and-out flirt. And she had earned it.

She walked stiffly. "Dee—" she began.

"I told Georgiana to tell him I was taking you back to your hotel," he said. He guided her back to the street, though he did not touch her.

"So that's the dark-eyed man you wanted," he burst out as they walked side by side, each trying to keep ahead of the other. "How on earth can a decent-looking girl fall for a man like that? Have you no sense? Any man or woman can tell by looking at him that he is a gigolo. And you said he was fine, straight as a pine tree! I suppose you fell for him on the train. You'd better go back to Iowa for another twenty years and get some common sense into your head. You don't know what you want."

Joyce could stand no more.

"Oh, stop it!" she cried. "Let me talk! I don't want Dee; I don't want that oily-haired gigolo. I wanted you!" she blurted out. "But you're so dumb, Bud Harwood, you fell for that redhead, too. I was talking about you when I wanted advice, and as for that oily-haired fellow, I never saw him before in my life. I was only trying to attract your attention when I smiled at him."

She stopped, breathing hard, in front of the hotel. She faced Bud, then dropped her head and stared at the sidewalk.

"I'm going back to Iowa tonight," she said brokenly. "You're right. I do need common sense and to learn to control my impulses."

Bud could only stare at her, like a man seeing a beautiful dream come true, but which he could not quite believe in yet.

She turned to run into the hotel. He came to abruptly.

With a start he grabbed her arm. "Sweetheart!" he cried. It was enough.

She whispered, "Don't you want Georgiana?"

He took her hands in his and held them tightly. "Foolish child. I wanted you the moment I saw you. But I tried like everything not to. I thought you belonged to Dee. That's why I was

so darn mean in the station. I flirted with Georgiana to make her forget Dee and leave him to you, if you wanted him."

"Oh, Bud!" she gasped. "I feel an impulse coming on." She looked up and down the street. There were people everywhere. But it did not kill the impulse.

"So do I," he said. He pulled her to him and kissed her squarely on the mouth and held her that way for two full minutes, right on Hollywood Boulevard.

Looking Forward

DESPERATE JOURNEY

Sue Fletcher was a mousy little person; no one ever saw her because her two beautiful sisters so far outshone her. So it was a surprise to everybody when Clem Nedinger asked her to marry him. "She'll never hold him," her mother mourned. "How did she ever catch him?" the office wondered.

Clem had to go to Singapore to open a branch for his firm. Sue was to come out to him as soon as he was settled. The months passed; the time came. She gave up her job, bought her trousseau, packed her trunk. And on the day before she was to sail a letter came from Clem breaking the engagement. He was in love with another girl.

Sue sat back on her heels beside the overflowing trunk. She thought what it would be like to face her friends and family, to hunt a job again. The pity, the sneers, the raised eyebrows, the "I told you so's."

She couldn't take it. She closed and locked the trunk. She took her courage in both hands. She was going to sail on schedule and marry the man who had jilted her—or know the reason why!

By ELISABETH PETERSON

CITY GIRL MEETS COUNTRY BOY

Patsy Heath loved the Great White Way, and she didn't mean the frozen stretch of the North that was her sole inheritance, either. She wanted her Broadway playboy, and she made up her mind that timber tract should pay for him. But when she reached the great North country, she found a man who wasn't being sold down the river to suit any butterfly's whim.

By HELEN ST. BERNARD

PRETTY NOSE WANTED

She was Carrie Plotz, by vote the homeliest girl in America. She was a challenge to every beauty expert in New York. "Off with her nose!" they shouted. And they got her right down on the operating table before she realized that the race of love must be won by more than a nose.

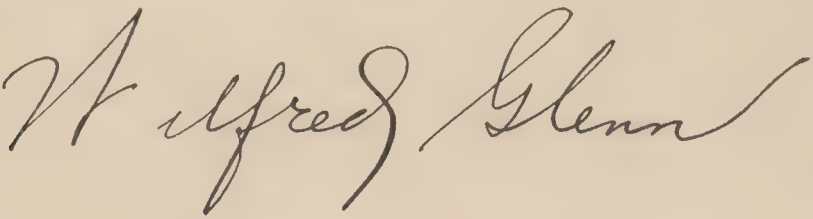
By JUNE ELDER

COMING IN NEXT WEEK'S ALL-STORY—LOVE TALES—MARCH 11

Your Pen Personality

By HELEN KING

A BIG man, a big voice, and a big handwriting. Such is our first glimpse of Wilfred Glenn, deep-voiced member of the Revellers Quartet. along certain lines. When high *above* the line, they mean mental and spiritual activity. When long *below*, they tell of physical activity.



True to his work, Mr. Glenn has perfect rhythm (as shown in the even "sweeps"); good poise (the careful balance in the letters) and a genuine love of self-expression.

For those who like to check their own writing against illustrations, Mr. Glenn's signature provides an excellent lesson.

W. High, wide and graceful, it tells of high aspirations, a love of action and a pleasing manner.

i. With a wavy, comma-shaped dot (not shown in the cut), this letter is found in the scripts of those whose sense of humor is keen and who get a kick out of life.

l. Comparatively small, with its crossing midway up the letter, this "l" is characteristic of a man who is not going to become obnoxious, forcing himself on others.

f. Looped letters, which extend quite some length both above and below the line of writing, tell of unusual activities

r. Pointed, clear and unmistakable, this letter shows a pride in appearance and work, and a consciousness of the self.

e. In this instance, it is interpreted the same as the "l."

d. With its loop, and long, hanging ending stroke, this letter shows first, chattiness, and second, a lot of stick-to-itiveness.

G. Again the high graceful letter, devoid of superfluous strokes, shows good taste and clearness of thought.

l. See the previous explanation, also for the second "e."

n. Rather wide and not as compact as the rest of the script, this letter shows that Wilfred Glenn is enthusiastic and sometimes "lets down his hair" and has a good time.

Now that you have the letters, add to it your knowledge of size, which means many diversified interests; the slant, telling of an affectionate, demonstrative man;

pressure, showing normal interests and desires; letters all connected—a logical artist; and a high ending stroke to the name serving in the same capacity as an underscore, revealing a personality entitled to, and accustomed to, receiving public acclaim.

All in all, I'd say that Wilfred Glenn's signature shows him up as a pretty nice fellow! You can address him at the National Broadcasting Company, New York, if you want that signature "in person." You'll find its owner a cordial personage.

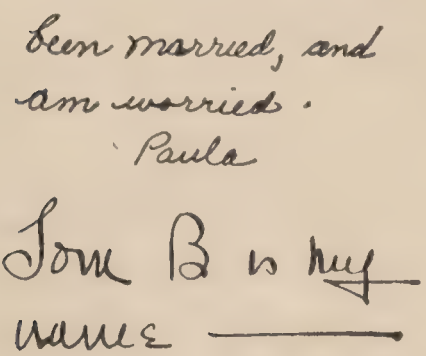
DEAR MISS KING:

I've been married before and therefore am worried about my second venture. Do you think I should be?

Frankly, he hasn't proposed yet, but he will. I know the signs. I'm forty and the fellow is twenty-nine. He is smitten, but I think he has a mother complex. Knowing that, should I marry him? My chances in the future will be less and less, but while Tom might be younger he acts older. He doesn't know my age.

Do you think we have a chance for happiness? I'm sending both of our writings. I think he is a swell boy, and I think I'm pretty lucky. He is strong, works hard, saves his money and can take care of me in my old age. I'll show him your answer.

PAULA D.



Betcha pencil stubs to erasers you don't show him the answer, for it isn't going to be very complimentary! Throughout your letter you have consistently thought of yourself, and haven't given Tom a break at all. Don't you think he deserves one, since you have elected him doctor, social security, provider, etc.?

I think you should worry about your second venture, for Tom does *not* have a mother complex! He is a healthy, normal young man who probably thinks of you as a friend. I'm very much afraid that a marriage built on deception won't work out.

Your best bet, both for yourself and Tom, is to talk up. Tell him you are older, more settled, and think he should know what you expect of him. Then give him a break. Tell him you don't expect him to go through with the marriage you have proposed. Give him an "out." If he snaps it up, you'll know he has been trying to figure out some way himself but may not have known how.

DEAR MISS KING:

How can I stifle gossip? I live in a rather small town where everyone knows when her neighbor has a new dress. That gives you an idea of the size. Now for the gossip.

I was jilted, but few know about it. I was in love some time ago, at school. At college, a little later, we were secretly engaged. I used to write home to the folks, telling them of Bert, but never of the engagement. Then, one day, Bert skipped off and married. You can be sure I was glad I hadn't said anything, but now Bert and Mrs. Bert have moved into my home town, and Mrs. Bert is talking.

What can I say? The neighbors aren't quite ready to believe her, but they will be soon if I don't start talking fast myself.

WORRIED

You answered your own question: start talking fast. Let the neighbors think that *you* did the jilting. As long as Mrs. Bert isn't turning out to be a pleasant newcomer, you'll just have to use her own tactics. When she finds it out she will probably stop her talking. Fight fire with fire!

There is nothing so malicious as gossip, and drastic measures are easily forgiven under the circumstances.

DEAR MISS KING:

I'd give a dollar to get my boy friend to write, but he won't. Do you think he has a guilty conscience? Every time I ask him to write a letter he looks rather queerly at me. Thus I've never been able to get his writing

for you to analyze.

He will telephone me, send me candy, take me out—but he won't write. I'm beginning to worry.

GLORIA S.

Why worry? The poor boy is the one to wonder. He has probably been told never to "put it in writing." "Do right and fear no man. Don't write and fear no woman." For centuries mothers have advised their sons against penning the girl friend a line or two. If you tell your friend what you want, you may get his signature; otherwise you probably won't.

DEAR MISS KING:

I can't get work, but my fiancée has a pretty good job. I'm just about desperate because we want to get married. Grace, my fiancée, says we should marry, and that she can support us until I get work. I can't see this. Grace said to let you decide.

ROBERT N.

Good for you! Don't start married life a gigolo, or you'll never hear the end of it. Times are getting better; work is picking up; and more jobs will be available in the future. If you were already married and had to depend on Grace's income, it would be hard enough. Don't start married life with a handicap. Grace will have more respect for you, and so will the rest of the world.

PURELY PERSONAL

D. F. C. Bob Burns is married; has a 16-year-old son by his first wife (who died) and an infant daughter by his second wife. He lives in California permanently now, and is reported to be making thousands of shekels per week. Address him % NBC, Hollywood, California, or in care of the program and station in your district. Radio stations forward all mail, so allow a couple or three weeks for lapse of time.

R. F. K. Ross Graham is heard with Lucille Manners on the concert hour every Friday evening. Listen in. You'll find the program listed; it is 8 P. M., New York time.

W. E. Y. The radio networks do not buy songs for the artists to sing. Songs are handled through the music publishing companies. You can obtain a list of addresses from the Information Bureau at Washington, D. C. Radio artists are not in a position to buy and sing anything they want. All songs are "unionized" in their printing, etc., and must be "cleared" by the radio officials.

MISS HELEN KING, This coupon is not good after March 11, 1939

ALL-STORY—LOVE TALES MAGAZINE,
280 Broadway, New York, N. Y.

I enclose hand writing specimen for advice and analysis.

Name..... Age.....

Address .....

.....

A STAMPED SELF-ADDRESSED ENVELOPE MUST ACCOMPANY THIS COUPON

(Canadian readers, please send U. S. stamps, or coin. Readers from all other foreign countries should send International Reply Coupon, properly stamped by post office.)

What's in a Name?

By ADRIENNE PEABODY

WHAT 1939 HOLDS FOR YOU

WOULDN'T you like to know what Fate holds in store for you during the coming months? Mrs. Peabody, your numerologist, will be glad to send you a forecast, on receipt of the coupon at the end of this department.

THERE has been much speculation as to whether Carole Lombard would marry Clark Gable if, and when, his present wife divorced him.

Carole was born plain Jane Peters thirty years ago on October 6. A numerologist changed her name to Carol Lombard, and later on she added the "e" to her first name. As has been said here before, "6" is the domestic number, and people whose day of birth is "6," or adds to number "6," have some years of matrimony; whether with more than one marriage can be determined through the rest of their charts.

Clark Gable was born

February 1, 1901

$$\frac{\text{2 1 11}}{\text{}} = 5 \text{ Destiny}$$

This is not a birth date of one with a very settled life; the fact that he has already had two marriages shows this.

Carole Lombard's numbers show more settled conditions than do Clark Gable's, although she has already divorced one husband, William Powell. This year both Clark and Carole come under a strongly romantic vibration, so matrimony seems indicated.

And as the latter part of Clark's life is less restless and hectic than the early part, let us hope that these two make a real "go" of their marriage.

Some very interesting letters are waiting for an answer. The first one comes from Brooklyn, New York:

DEAR ADRIENNE PEABODY:

Probably you can answer what is bothering me. I can not understand why my

husband, who is a good worker, cannot get steady work. Is it his age? He is fifty-three and was born on February 15, while my birth date was July 29, 1890.

He was in business for himself, but it lasted only a year, as his partner was not the working kind. Since then, although he has a job, it pays so small a salary that he worries a lot, because he cannot do his duty as a provider.

I should like to know if there are changes for him, or is he too old? He would like to be in business again for himself. What would you advise? Also, should we move to a smaller place with less rent? Is this the time to make the change?

MRS. L. G.

DEAR MRS. L. G.:

No, your husband is not too old to be successful in business for himself, or employed by someone else. He is coming into the best period of his life two years from now, so keep your courage up.

This year should mean promotion before it is over. You are the careful member of the family and worry too much about the future, according to your numbers, and it affects your husband. Try to encourage him more. And let me hear from you again.

A Midwestern mother writes me the next letter:

DEAR MRS. PEABODY:

My daughter's birth date is October 4, 1911. She is very unhappy with her husband, and is separating from him. Please tell me what the future holds for her, if she leaves him.

DEAR MOTHER OF LEORA:

Wish you had sent me your son-in-law's date of birth. Anyway, from your daughter's, it is apparent that she is finishing up with a chapter of her life. Later on she is apt to marry again (but some years later), and should have a life of stability and success.

A young Southern girl's letter follows, in part:

DEAR ADRIENNE PEABODY:

I change my mind time and again, but the last three years have been mad ones.

I have dated a boy for two years. His birth date is January 26. And since that time I have been engaged to one or two more boys. I really don't want to marry this boy, but since I've quit dating him, I am not satisfied with any other boy.

He is now dating my best girl friend, and she tries to get me to come to her house when he is there, because I told her I don't like him. When I marry it must be for love. Maybe I shouldn't marry at all, for I want to go in training for a nurse.

Please tell me what is best. My date of birth is May 31, 1916.

OLETUS

DEAR OLETUS:

You have a most unusual name, and it suits you. There is no use disguising the fact that you are too changeable at present to know your own mind, so better keep free from all entanglements. Later on you will have more balance and sense. Of course you can never hope to be happy in love if you play fast and loose with several boys at the same time.

The study of nursing would be an excellent thing for you.

Hope you stick to it! And you can, if you will.

The following comes from Honolulu:

DEAR ADRIENNE PEABODY:

My name is Udelia, and I've never heard this name called by any other girl. I'm very unhappy, and seem to be unlucky in love, friends and many other things. I do wish you would tell me if my name has anything to do with it. Also, what does it mean? Do not know where my parents got this name.

My sisters and parents don't love me, and I have been away from home for almost six years. Do you think I shall be somebody some day?

I'll be waiting for your answer. Thank you, Adrienne Peabody.

UDELIA K.

MY DEAR UDELIA:

A lovely name, and one which shows imagination *plus;* also too much sensitiveness at times. That is your greatest handicap toward happiness. Why not decide that you will curb this quality during 1939, and also that you can win the love of your parents and sisters, if you patiently try for it?

And, Udelia, it is the greatest victory in the world to win, because it means victory over yourself. Much joy to you my dear, and you *can be successful!*

A somewhat different letter follows:

DEAR MRS. PEABODY:

I would like so much to have your advice and analysis of two names and birth dates,

one is my own, and the other my girl friend's.

My problem is whether I should trust this friend as much as I have. I like her, and have confided in her, but whether she talks about me behind my back I don't know. We both live in small towns a few miles apart, and the people are gossipy. My friend runs around a great deal, smokes, drinks and is much talked about, although she has supported herself all her life. Her date of birth is April 6, 1919, and mine is June 24, 1922.

Of course she is the object of a lot of malicious gossip, and a lot of her innocent doings are magnified. I hope you can and will help me. I believe that underneath she has a fine mind, and would prove a lasting friend, but my family and friends object to her. This association seems to be giving me a reputation, too, although I never do any of the things she does, and haven't even a boy friend. She is so interesting and broad-minded and mixes with all kinds of people, which I am not permitted to do.

JUNE A.

DEAR JUNE:

You know the old saying, "birds of a feather flock together," and even if it isn't true, you usually get the same reputation as the people with whom you associate.

I don't think there is any real harm in your friend, but she is too independent to change (according to her birth date) so if I were you I would be friends, but not too intimate. She is so much more colorful than your background, that such an association is naturally a temptation to you. But you are at a time in your life when your friends are important to you.

You are a girl with much stability of character, and should make an excellent marriage and have a family, at an early age, too. So this time listen to your family, but at the same time be tactful, and don't hurt your friend.

From Ontario some one asks me whether a permanent position will be secured this year, and when. The date of birth is June 23, 1896, and the initials are "A. N. S."

DEAR A. N. S.:

Although the past year was changeful for you, 1939 should bring you more settled conditions and a steady job. Let me hear how you work out.

Yours in Service,

ADRIENNE PEABODY

City Girl Meets Country Boy

By HELEN ST. BERNARD

In Next Week's Issue

ADRIENNE PEABODY,
ALL-STORY—LOVE TALES,
280 Broadway, New York, N. Y.

This coupon is not good after March 11, 1939

Kindly print or type the following information:

Please send me your forecast of my destiny for 1939.

Name (as it was given at birth).....

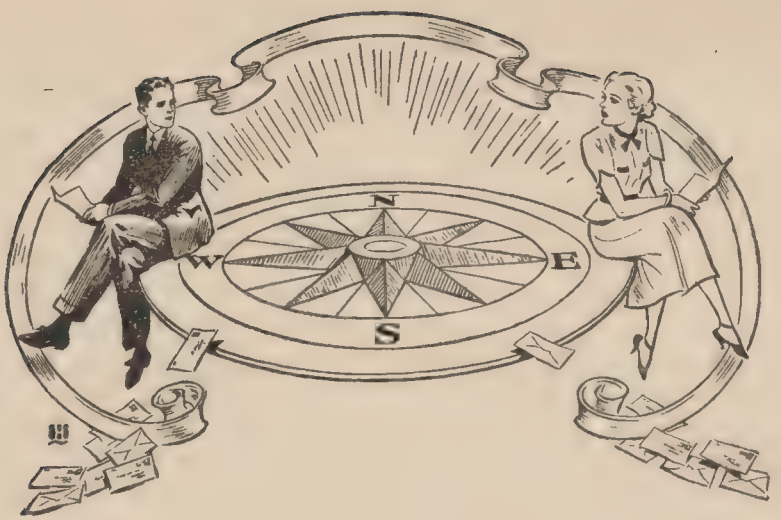
Name (as you sign it now).....

Address .....

Birth Date (month, day and year).....

A STAMPED, SELF-ADDRESSED ENVELOPE MUST ACCOMPANY THIS COUPON

(Canadian readers, please send U.S. stamps, or coin. Readers from all other foreign countries should send International Reply Coupon, properly stamped by post office.)



The Lonesome Circle

Conducted by DOROTHEA DALE

MAKE FRIENDS! JOIN THE LONESOME CIRCLE!

WRITE your plea for pals to Mrs. Dale, in care of ALL-STORY—LOVE TALES, 280 Broadway, New York, N. Y. When you write to other pals, enclose a plain, stamped envelope and tell Mrs. Dale for whom your letter is intended. Be sure to sign your full name and address. Girls may write only to girls; boys may write only to boys.

(Canadian readers, please send U. S. stamps, or coin. Readers from all other foreign countries should send International Reply Coupon, properly stamped by post office.)

DEAR MRS. DALE:

You seem to have more girls than boys in your friendly circle, but believe me some of us boys are lonely, too. Take me, for instance. I am a young man, 25 years of age, and my parents have departed and left me to live alone in the homestead in the southern part of New York State. I love the out-of-doors and have a hobby of hunting Indian relics and collecting curios.

Just the same I need friends. So how about asking some of the pals, from 15 to 30 years of age, to sling some ink my way? I promise to be a true pen pal myself, and to answer all letters I receive.

Lonesome Rik.

A LITTLE IRISH COLLEEN NEXT: I am 16 years old, and I have dark brown curly hair and brown eyes. I'm 5 feet 2 inches tall and weigh 104 pounds. My favorite sport is ice skating. My hobbies are dancing and collecting movie stars' pictures. Please don't disappoint me, will you?

Long Island Kate.

COME ON! GET THOSE PENS GOING! I am 19 years of age, 5 feet 5 inches tall and weigh 115 pounds. Would like to hear from pen pals far and near. My own hobbies are ice and roller skating, baseball, hiking and most out-

door sports. Am also interested in movie stars and dancing. Let's hear from all over the continent.

Ohio Ruth.

IF YOU'RE AROUND 14, DROP HER A LINE. I am a girl 14 years of age, and I should be much interested in hearing from girls about my age. Am 5 feet 1 inch tall, and have light brown hair and blue eyes. I like dancing, swimming, tennis and soft ball. Want a pen pal very much, and I promise to answer every letter I receive.

Friendly Maxine.

BALLROOM DANCING IS TOPS WITH HER. I am 15 years of age, 5 feet 4 inches tall, with black curly hair, brown eyes and a fair complexion. Am interested in such sports as swimming, basketball and tennis. My hobbies are ballroom dancing and collecting movie stars' pictures. Will exchange snapshots. Please write and keep my mailbox filled. Won't you?

Sandy of Greenport, L. I.

HERE'S LOOKING FOR YOU! I am in search of new acquaintances. I am 4 feet 11 inches tall, and 16 years old. My favorite sports are ice skating, swimming, tennis, bike riding, basketball, roller skating and writing letters. I am in the tenth grade.

Tiny of Iowa.

SHE HAS AN INTERESTING HOBBY, TOO. I am a person who is not hard to satisfy, for I am interested in all people. So no matter who you are, or what you do, won't you be kind and write to me? Anyone from 10 to 100 is welcome.

Would enjoy hearing from all far-off places, for I collect covers, and your envelopes would be a great help to me. But of course I want your letters, too! Would very much like to hear from China, Haiti, the Virgin Islands, India, Egypt and, in fact, all foreign countries. But don't forget that you in the United States are just as welcome. I love the great outdoors and sports. My hobbies are collecting all kinds of things, too numerous to mention. But just write and I'll tell you all about them; maybe I can help you out. Who knows?

Remember now, all are welcome from everywhere, and the more the merrier, as I enjoy writing letters. I'll be pleased to make life brighter for the shut-ins and the unfortunate, by writing, so cheer up! Here's a friend waiting.

Grayce, A Friend to All.

JIGSAW PUZZLE FIEND, TICKLED TO PIECES TO MAKE PALS! I would like to make friends with all girls between the ages of 15 and 20. Am 16 years of age, 5 feet 3 inches tall and weigh 126 pounds. I love dancing, bike riding, skating and especially doing jigsaw puzzles. Would like to hear from pals all over the world, especially Hawaii, Hollywood, Panama and China. Come on, girls. Write to me and don't be bashful!

Teddy of Brooklyn.

SHORT AND SWEET, BUT FRIENDLY. I am a girl 14 years old, weighing 116 pounds. Have dark blond hair and blue eyes. Come on, pen pals. Sling a little ink my way. I will answer all letters and am dying to do it!

Texas Virginia.

HIYA, WESTERN GALS! HERE'S A CUSTOMER. I am awfully interested in the West of the United States and read all about it that I can find. Do you suppose it would be possible to actually hear from some of the pals who live out in that country? My hobby is sport, especially hockey, and I am very fond of dancing, too. I was eighteen in February. All letters will be heartily welcome.

Jeanne of England. (5c postage)

SHE'S A HOOSIER GAL. WHO'S YOURS? Am 18 years old, 5 feet 1½ inches tall, and weigh 100 pounds. Work in a real estate office. My hobby is reading, and the sports I like best are swimming and skating. My ambition is to travel and see the world. This is my first experience searching for pen pals, so come on, everybody, and don't disappoint me.

Barby of Indiana.

HE SAYS HE'S GOOD. WANT TO MAKE SOMEP'N OF IT? I'm a boy, 14 years old (almost 15), who lives in Chicago and is anxious to correspond with anyone. Am a sophomore in high school; am 5 feet 8 inches tall; weigh 135 pounds. Am interested in all sports, especially basketball, tennis, swimming and pingpong. I'll answer all letters very interestingly, as I am said to possess that quality.

Norm of Chi.

WANTS IDEAS FROM FAR-AWAY PLACES. I am a married woman, 32 years old, with three daughters. I collect stamps, hankies, odd plants, tiny odd dolls and tiny doll furniture, also stamps. I do all kinds of fancywork. Would love to hear from pals in India, Scotland, Ireland, New Zealand, Africa and Canada, as my health is not of the best and I love to get new ideas from far-away places.

Renee of Jersey.

SHE'S PATIENT, BUT SHE WANTS YOU TO HURRY, JUST THE SAME. I am a high school girl, 16 years old, and I'd like to hear from pen pals far and near, between the ages of 14 and 18. I live in a small country town, which has little excitement. My favorite hobbies are sports and making new friends. Will gladly exchange snapshots with anyone. Hurry, girls! I'm waiting patiently to hear from you.

Gracie of Oregon.

SHE'S NEVER HAD A PEN PAL; WON'T YOU BREAK THE JINX? I am a girl of 14, living in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. I've never had a pen pal, but I hope my plea will send at least one pal to my home.

Am a brunette, 5 feet 3 inches tall, and weigh 95 pounds. Fond of outdoor sports, especially ice skating. And I collect pictures of my favorite

movie star, Tyrone Power. Will gladly exchange snapshots and information about the city I live in. Won't someone please write and answer my plea? I hope to make my letters interesting.

June of Wisconsin.

IT LARGELY DEPENDS ON WHERE YOU LIVE. Young man of 21, from Florida, now in the nation's Capitol, would like to hear from young fellows between the ages of 18 and 25, residing in any cities, hick or otherwise, between Richmond, Va. and New York City; also especially from Los Angeles and vicinity. I'm tall, slim, have light brown hair, blue eyes and a pleasing personality and clean-cut looks. Will appreciate any little note at all.

Southern Tom.

SHE'D ENJOY IT IF YOU'D WRITE TO HER. I am a girl of 15, who would like to join your Lonesome Circle. Am a high school student. Like all sports, and my favorite hobbies are dancing and roller skating. Would enjoy having pen pals from the U. S. A. and foreign countries, too. Will answer all letters that I receive, so please give me a chance.

J. P. of Mass.

COME ON, PALS, DIAL IN TO THIS: I am a girl of 13, and I wish to join your circle of friends. Have brown curly hair and blue eyes, am 5 feet tall and weigh 86 pounds. Love to dance, sing and skate. My hobby is writing poems and stories for my own amusement. Also play the piano. Won't you girls please write to me? I will answer all letters.

Nancy of Ohio.

SHE LIKES PICTURES—AND TAKES 'EM. I would like to get acquainted with pen pals all over the world, between the ages of 18 and 21. Am 18 myself; 5 feet 5 inches tall. Like to dance, attend movies, and photography is a great hobby of mine. Will answer all letters, so don't keep me waiting too long.

Miss M. of England. (5c postage)

BACHELOR IN HIS YOUNG THIRTIES. I would like to have pen pals between the ages of 20 and 40, especially if they live in the West. However, all are welcome. Am considered very broad-minded and understanding. Also am considered very good to look at, and I try to have a pleasing personality. I do not mix so well with the opposite sex, as I had the love bug fly away when I was quite young.

Prince.

ANY ANIMAL LOVERS PRESENT? Young girl of 14½ wants pals. I have black hair, blue eyes and am not very tall. Love reading and going to the movies. Am very fond of animals.

Anne from England. (5c postage)

WELCOME, LADY OF THE NORTH! Here comes another Newfoundlander to join your circle. Am 39 years old, married, have no children. Weigh 122 pounds, am 5 feet 3 inches tall, have brown hair, blue eyes and a light complexion. Have been married 20 years. My husband is a fisherman. For a hobby I knit. So come on, pals, and write to a lonesome wife who promises to answer all letters.

Mrs. Blue Eyes.

WANTS PLENTY OF PALS—AND SHE MEANS PLENTY! I am a girl of 15, 5 feet 2 inches tall, weighing 101 pounds. My auburn hair is naturally curly, and I have deep blue eyes. Have several hobbies, and love all outdoor sports. Would like to hear from girls, 15 to 20 years old, but all are welcome and will be answered, pronto, Everybody, all over the world, hear my plea!

Charlotte of Okahoma.

DRAWING PICTURES IS WHAT SHE LIKES. Am 14 years old, with brown hair and blue eyes. Love all kinds of sports, especially horseback riding and skating. Most of all I like to draw. Won't all girls far and wide write to me? I'll answer all letters received as soon as I get them.

Dotty of Oregon.

TO BOYS FROM 16 TO 23 YEARS ONLY: We are two C.C.C. boys, looking for friends of any kind. We are both 5 feet 6 inches tall, and have brown eyes and hair. Will exchange snapshots. Come on, come all. Our mail box is always open. Our nicknames are

Ray and Gene.

MARRIED? SINGLE? COME ON IN! I would like pen pals, either married or single, to write to me. Am married myself, and have two girls, but I can always find time to answer all letters received. My hobbies are reading, writing, embroidering, and most of all I love the movies. So won't you please write and help fill my mail box? Come on, all. I'll be waiting.

Mrs. Lucie of L. I.

CIVIL ENGINEER WANTS CIVIL PALS. I am 5 feet 10 inches tall, with light hair and blue eyes. I am an engineer by profession (civil) and at present am engaged in building roads in Mississippi. Enjoy movies, opera, football, and can play the piano. Will promise to answer all letters regardless of age and distance.

Southern Engineer.

SHE'LL ANSWER THE FIRST FIFTY LETTERS, SO HURRY! I am a girl 21 years old with red hair and gray eyes. Am 5 feet tall and weigh 102 pounds. Love fun of all kinds. I dance the Big Apple and the Black Bottom. Would love to hear from girls everywhere from 18 to 50 years of age. Come on, pals. Let's get going.

Ernestine of Calif.

ONE LITTLE GIRL WITH TWO NAMES. I am 13 years old and in the eighth grade. Love basketball, baseball, football, jazz and dancing. Am 5 feet 4 and weigh 115 pounds; have blond hair and blue eyes. Am not lonely, but would

like to hear from some girls my age. Promise to answer promptly, and am willing to exchange pictures. My last name is Judy and my friends all call me

Punch 'n Judy.

HE WANTS A BREAK. I'm a young man, 20 years old, who would like to have a pal in every state in the Union, as well as in many foreign countries. Am almost 6 feet tall and weigh 170 pounds. I've graduated from high school and also business college. Promise to answer all letters received. My hobbies are exchanging view cards and letters. So come on. *Please* give me a break: all you fellows between the ages of 18 and 24 sling your ink this way.

Chuck of W. Va.

SCOTLAND'S YEARNING TO HEAR FROM YOU. I am a girl of 22 and come from Scotland. Would like pals from all over the world, but especially from Hawaii, Australia, New Zealand, South Africa. But all letters are welcome. So come on, girls. I'm waiting. I have many hobbies, but I will tell you about them when you write. Can also tell you many interesting things about Scotland. Am 5 feet 4 inches in height, my weight is 118, and I have brown wavy hair and a fair complexion. Hurry, please, and write!

Scotch Agnes. (5c postage)

SHE LIKES FUN—ANY ARGUMENT? I like all kinds of sports and everything that is fun. Especially dancing, ice skating, roller skating, tennis, movies and games of all kinds. But I like letters from pen pals best of all. Would also like to exchange photos. My hair is light brown and my eyes are blue-gray. Tell you more later.

Bunny of Michigan.

JUST A JITTERBUG AT HEART. I am a very lonely boy of 17 years, and would like to have pen pals from all over the world if I could. Am 5 feet 8 inches tall, with blond hair and blue eyes. Have traveled all up and down the eastern coast of the United States and would gladly describe my trip and the sights I have seen to all of the pals who care to hear about it. Am fond of dancing, and have won a few prizes at it. I guess I'm just a jitterbug at heart. I'll answer any letters I receive promptly, and here's hoping I hear from you all.

Mor, the Jitterbug.

SHE WANTS AT LEAST FORTY-EIGHT PEN PALS. I have been longing for pen pals all over the world, so maybe you can help me out. Am a girl of 15 with blond hair and blue eyes; 5 feet 7 inches tall and weighing 110 pounds. I love all kinds of sports, especially swimming, skating and dancing. Would like to have a pen pal in every state in the Union, as well as some in foreign countries.

Olive of Mass.

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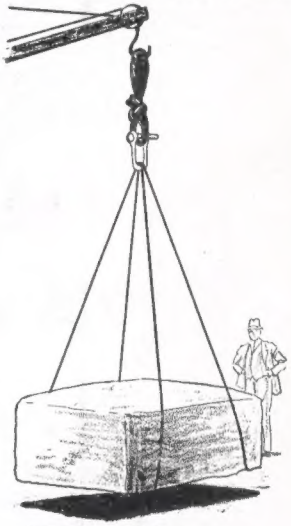

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